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AUTHOR OF

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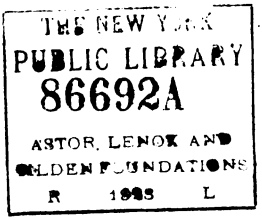

New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 125 North Wabash Ave.
Toronto: 25 Richmond Street, W.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 100 Princes Street

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CHARACTERS

Macgreegor.....Enlists in the 9th Highland Light Infantry, on his 19th birthday. In love with Christina.

John Robinson..His father—foreman of engineering works.

Lizzie Robinson..His mother—a kind, generous-hearted Scotswoman.

Jeannie.....Mac's sister, aged about 13.

Jimsie.....Mac's little brother.

Uncle Purdie....Mac's uncle — a prosperous Glasgow grocer who employed Mac, and keeps his job open for him.

Aunt Purdie....Looked on by the Robinson family as a lady of social ambitions.

Willie Thomson..Mac's friend and erstwhile school-mate.

Miss Tod.....Owner of a stationery shop, where Christina is employed.

Christina.....A pretty Scots lassie, with a tender heart, but determined not to show it.

I

ARMS AND THE MAID

THROUGH the gateway flanked by tall recruiting posters came rather hurriedly a youth of no great stature, but of sturdy build and comely enough countenance, including bright brown eyes and fresh complexion. Though the dull morning was coldish, perspiration might have been detected on his forehead. Crossing the street, without glance to right or left, he increased his pace; also, he squared his shoulders and threw up his head with an air that might have been defiance at the fact of his being more than an hour late for his day's work. His face, however, betrayed a certain spiritual emotion not suggestive of anticipated trouble with employer or foreman. As a matter of fact, the familiar every-day

duty had ceased to exist for him, and if his new exaltation wavered a little as he neared the warehouse, fifteen minutes later, it was only because he would have to explain things to the uncle who employed him, and to other people; and he was ever shy of speaking about himself.

So he hurried through the warehouse without replying to the chaffing inquiries of his mates, and ran upstairs to his uncle's office. He was not afraid of his uncle; on the other hand, he had never received or expected special favour on account of the relationship.

Mr. Purdie was now a big man in the grocery trade. He had a cosy private room with a handsome desk, a rather gorgeous carpet and an easy-chair. He no longer attended at the counter or tied up parcels—except when, alone on the premises late in the evening, he would sometimes furtively serve imaginary customers, just for auld lang syne, as he excused to himself his absurd proceeding.

"But what kep' ye late, Macgreegor?" he inquired with a futile effort to make his good-humoured, whiskered visage assume a stern expression. "Come, come, oot wi' it! An' 'unce o' guid reasons is worth a pun' o' fair apologies."

"The recruitin' office," said Macgreegor, blushing, "wasna open till nine."

"The recruitin' office! What—what—guidsake, laddie, dinna tell me ye've been thinkin' o' enlistin'!"

"I've enlisted."

Mr. Purdie fell back in his chair.

"The 9th H.L.I.," said Macgreegor, and, as if to improve matters if possible, added, "Glesca Hielanders—Kilts."

The successful grocer sat up, pulled down his waistcoat and made a grimace which he imagined to be a frown. "Neither breeks nor kilts," he declared heavily, "can cover deceit. Ye're under age, Macgreegor. Ye're but eichteen!"

"Nineteen, Uncle Purdie."

"Eh? An' when was ye nineteen?"

"This mornin'."

Mr. Purdie's hand went to his mouth, apparently to stop a guffaw. Presently he soberly inquired what his nephew's parents had said on the matter.

"I ha'ena tell't them yet."

"Ah, that's bad. What—what made ye enlist?"

Macgreegor knew, but could not have put it in words.

"Gettin' tired o' yer job here?"

"Na, Uncle Purdie.

"H'm!" Mr. Purdie fondled his left whisker. "An' when—a—ha'e ye got to —a—jine yer regiment?"

"The morn's mornin'. I believe we're gaun into camp immediately."

"Oho! So ye'll be wantin' to be quit o' yer job at once. Weel, weel, if ye feel it's yer duty to gang, lad, I suppose it's mine to let ye gang as cheery as I can. But—I maun tell yer aunt." Mr. Purdie rose.

Macgreegor smiled dubiously. "*She'll* no' be pleased onyway."

"Aw, ye never can tell what'll please yer aunt. At least, that's been ma experience for quarter o' a century. But it'll be best to tell her—through the 'phone, of course. A handy invention the 'phone. Whiles, bide here till I come back."

He was absent a few minutes and returned checking a smile.

"I couldna ha'e presumed frae her voice that she was delighted," he reported; "but she commanded me to gi'e ye five pounds for accidental expenses, as she calls them, an' yer place here is to be preserved for ye, an' yer wages paid, even supposin' the war gangs on for fifty years."

With these words Mr. Purdie placed five notes in his astonished nephew's hand and bade him begone.

"Ye maun tell yer mither instanter. I canna understan' what way ye didna tell her first."

"I—I was feart I wud maybe be ower

wee for the Glesca Hielanders," Macgreegor explained.

"Ye seem to me to be a heid taller since yesterday. Weel, weel, God bless ye an' so forth. Come back an' see me in the efternune."

Macgreegor went out with a full heart as well as a well-filled pocket. It is hardly likely that the very first "accidental expense" which occurred to him could have been foreseen by Aunt Purdie—yet who shall discover the secrets of that august lady's mind?

On his way home he paused at sundry shop windows—all jewellers'. And he entered one shop, not a jeweller's, however, but the little stationery and fancy goods shop owned by Miss M. Tod, and managed, with perhaps more conscience than physical toil, by the girl he had been courting for two years without having reached anything that could be termed a definite understanding, though their relations were

of the most friendly and confidential nature.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Christina, at his entrance at so unusual an hour; "is the clock off its onion, or ha'e ye received the sack?"

He was not quick at answering, and she continued: "Ye're ower early, Mac. Yer birthday present'll no be ready till the evenin', still, here's wishin' ye many happies, an' may ye keep on improvin'."

He smiled in a fashion that struck her as unfamiliar.

"What's up, Mac?" she asked, kindly. "Surely ye ha'e na cast oot wi' yer uncle?"

"I've enlisted," he softly exploded.

She stared, and the colour rose in her pretty face, but her voice was calm. "Lucky you!" said she.

He was disappointed. Involuntarily he exclaimed, "Ye're no a bit surprised!"

"What regiment?"

He told her, and she informed him that he wouldn't look so bad in the kilt. He

announced that he was to report himself on the morrow, and she merely commented, "Quick work."

"But, Christina, ye couldna ha'e guessed I was for enlistin'," he said after a pause.

"I was afraid—I mean for to say, I fancied ye were the sort to dae it. If I had kent for sure, I wad ha'e been knittin' ye socks instead o' a silly tie for yer birthday."

"Ha'e ye been knittin' a tie for *me?*"

"Uh-ha—strictly platonic, of course."

She had used the word more than once in the past, and he had not derived much comfort from looking it up in the dictionary. But now he was going—he told himself—to be put off no longer. Seating himself at the counter, he briefly recounted his uncle's kindness and his aunt's munificence. Then he attempted to secure her hand.

She evaded his touch, asking as to how

his parents had taken his enlistment. On his answering——

"Dear, dear!" she cried, with more horror than she may have felt, "an' here ye are, wastin' the precious time in triflin' conversation wi' me!"

"It's you that's daein' the triflin'." he retorted, with sudden spirit; "an' it's your fault I'm here noo instead o' at hame."

"Well, I never!" she cried. "I believe I gave ye permission to escort me from these premises at 8 p.m.," she proceeded in her best English, which he hated, "but I have not the slightest recollection of invitin' ye to call at 10 a.m. However, the 8 p.m. appointment is hereby cancelled."

"Cancel yer Auntie Kate!" he rejoined, indignant. "Hoo can ye speak like that when dear knows when I'll see ye again?"

"Oh, ye'll no be at the front for a week or so yet, an' we'll hope for the best. Still, I'll forgive ye, seein' it's yer nineteenth birthday. Only I'm thinkin' yer parents

'll be wantin' ye to keep the hoose the nicht."

Macgreegor's collar seemed to be getting tight, for he tugged at it as he said: "I'll tell them I'm gaun to see *you.*"

"That'll but double the trouble," she said, lightly.

Their eyes met, and for the first time in their acquaintance, perhaps, hers were first to give way.

"Christina," he said, abruptly, "I want to burst that five pound."

"Ye extravagant monkey!"

"On a—a ring."

"A ring! Ha'e ye enlisted as a colonel?" But her levity lacked sparkle.

As for Macgreegor, he had dreamed of this moment for ages. "Ye'll tak' it. Christina?" he whispered. "Gi'e me yer size—a hole in a bit pasteboard . . . " Speech failed him.

"Me?" she murmured—and shook her head. "Ye're ower young, Mac," she said, gently.

"I'm a year aulder nor you . . . Christina, let's get engaged afore I gang —say ye will?"

She moved a little way up the counter and became engrossed in the lurid cover of a penny novel. He moved also until he was directly opposite.

"Christina! . . . Yer third finger is aboot the same as ma wee yin."

"Ay; but ye needna remind me o' ma clumsy han's."

"Play fair," he said. "Will ye tak' the ring?"

"I dinna ken, Mac."

But her hand was in his.

Too soon they heard Miss Tod stirring in the back room.

"If ye spend mair nor a pound on a ring," said Christina, "I'll reconsider ma decision!"

"Ye've decided!" he almost shouted.

"No yet," she said, with a gesture of dismissal as Miss Tod entered.

II

BREAKING IT GENTLY

THE quest of the right ring occupied the whole of the forenoon, and Macgreegor reached his home in bare time for the family dinner. He desired to break his news as gently as possible, so, after making, to his mother's annoyance, a most wretched meal, he said to his father, who was lighting his pipe, in a voice meant to be natural:

"I got five pound frae Aunt Purdie the day."

"Ye what!" Mr. Robinson dropped the match, and shouted to his wife, who, assisted by their daughter, was starting to wash up. "Lizzie! Did ever ye hear the like? Macgreegor's got five pound frae his Aunt Purdie! Dod, but that's a braw birthday——"

"She said it was for accidental expenses," stammered the son.

Lizzie turned and looked at him. "What ails ye the day, laddie?"

"Uncle Purdie's guan to keep ma place for me," he floundered.

"Keep yer place for ye!" cried John. "What's a' this aboot accidental expenses? Ha'e ye got hurt?"

Mrs. Robinson came over and laid a damp hand on her boy's shoulder. "Macgreegor, ye needna be feart to tell us. We can thole it." She glanced at her husband, and said, in a voice he had not often heard: "John, oor wee Macgreegor has growed up to be a sojer"—and went back to her dishes.

Later, and just when he ought to be returning to his work, Mr. Robinson, possibly for the mere sake of saying something, requested a view of the five pounds.

"Ay," seconded Lizzie, cheerfully, whilst her hand itched to grab the money and convey it to the bank, "let's see them,

laddie." And sister Jeannie and small brother Jimsie likewise gathered round the hero.

With a feeble grin, Macgreegor produced his notes.

"He's jist got three!" cried Jimsie.

"Whisht, Jimsie!" whispered Jeannie.

"Seems to ha'e been a bad accident already!" remarked John, laughing boisterously.

"John," said Lizzie, "ye'll be late. Macgreegor'll maybe walk a bit o' the road wi' ye."

They were well on their way to the engineering works, where Mr. Robinson was foreman, when Macgreegor managed to say:

"I burst the twa pound on a ring."

"Oho!" said John, gaily; then solemnly, "What kin' o' a ring, Macgreegor?"

"An engagement yin," the ruddy youth replied.

Mr. Robinson laughed, but not very heartily. "So long as it's no a weddin'

ring. . . . Weel, weel, this is the day for news." He touched his son's arm. "It'll be the young lass in the stationery shop—her that ye whiles see at yer Uncle Purdie's hoose—eh?"

"Hoo did ye ken?"

"Oh, jist guessed. It's her?"

"Maybe. . . . She hasna ta'en the ring yet."

"But ye think she will, or ye wudna ha'e tell't me. Weel, I'm sure I wish ye luck, Macgreegor. She's a bonny bit lass, rael clever, I wud say, an'—an' gey stylish."

"She's no that stylish—onyway, no stylish like Aunt Purdie."

"Ah, but ye maunna cry doon yer Aunt Purdie——"

"I didna mean that. But ye ken what I mean, fayther."

"Oh, fine, fine," Mr. Robinson replied, thankful that he had not been asked to explain precisely what *he* had meant. "She bides wi' her uncle an' aunt, does

she no?" he continued, thoughtfully. I'm wonderin' what they'll say aboot this. I doobt they'll say ye're far ower young to be thinkin' o' a wife."

It was on Macgreegor's tongue to retort that he had never thought of such a thing, when his father went on——

"An' as for yer mither, it'll be a terrible surprise to her. I suppose ye'll be tellin' her as sune's ye get back?"

"Ay. . . . Are ye no pleased about it?"

"Me?" Mr. Robinson scratched his head. "Takin' it for granted that ye're serious aboot the thing, I was never pleaseder. Ye can tell yer mither that, if ye like."

Macgreegor was used to the paternal helping word at awkward moments, but he had never valued it so much as now. As a matter of fact, he dreaded his mother's frown less than her smile. Yet he need not have dreaded either on this occasion.

He found her in the kitchen, busy over a heap of more or less woolly garments belonging to himself. Jimsie was at afternoon school; Jeannie sat in the little parlour knitting as though life depended thereby.

He sat down in his father's chair by the hearth and lit a cigarette with fingers not quite under control.

"I'll ha'e to send a lot o' things after ye," Lizzie remarked. "This semmit's had its day."

"I'll be gettin' a bit leave afore we gang to the Front," said Macgreegor, as though the months of training were already nearing an end.

"If ye dinna get leave sune, I'll be up at the barracks to ha'e a word wi' the general."

"It'll likely be a camp, mither."

"Aweel, camp or barracks, see an' keep yer feet cosy, an' dinna smoke ower mony ceegarettes." She fell to with her needle.

At the end of a long minute, Macgree-

gor observed to the kettle: "I tell't fayther what I done wi' the twa pound."

"Did ye?"

"Ay. He—he was awfu' pleased."

"Was he?"

Macgreegor took a puff at his cold cigarette, and tried again. "He said I was to tell ye he was pleased."

"Oh, did he?"

"Never pleaseder in his life."

"That was nice," commented Lizzie, twirling the thread round the stitching of a button.

He got up, went to the window, looked out, possibly for inspiration, and came back with a little box in his hand.

"That's what I done," he said, dropped it on her sewing, and strolled to the window again.

After a long time, as it seemed, he felt her gaze and heard her voice.

"Macgreegor, are ye in earnest?"

"Sure." He turned to face her, but now she was looking down at the ring.

"It'll be Mistress Baldwin's niece ye mean," she said, at last.

"Hoo did ye ken?"

"A nice lass, but ower young like yersel'. An' yet"—she lifted her eyes to his—"ye're auld enough to be a sojer. Does she ken ye've enlisted?"

He nodded, looking away. There was something in his mother's eyes . . .

"Aweel," she said, as if to herself, "this war'll pit auld heids on some young shoothers." She got up, laid her seam deliberately on the table, and went to him. She put her arm round him. "Wi' yer King an' yer Country an' yer Christina," she said, with a sort of laugh, "there winna be a great deal o' ye left for yer mither. But she's pleased if you're pleased—this time, at ony rate." She released him. "I maun tell Jeannie," she said, leaving the kitchen.

Jeannie came, and for once that sensible little person talked nonsense. In her

eyes, by his engagement, her big brother had simply out-heroed himself.

"Aw, clay up, Jeannie," he cried at last, in his embarrassment. "Come on oot wi' me, an' I'll stan' ye a dizzen sliders."

III

FIRST BLOOD

MACGREEGOR, his countenance shining with lover's anticipation and Sunlight soap, was more surprised than gratified to find Willie Thomson awaiting him at the close-mouth. For Willie, his oldest, if not his choicest friend, had recently jeered at his intention of becoming a soldier, and they had parted on indifferent terms, though Willie had succeeded in adding to a long list of borrowings a fresh item of twopence.

Willie and prosperity were still as far apart as ever, and even Willie could hardly have blamed prosperity for that. He had no deadly vices, but he could not stick to any job for more than a month. He was out of work at present. Having

developed into a rather weedy, seedy-looking young man, he was not too proud to sponge on the melancholy maiden aunt who had brought him up, and whose efforts at stern discipline during his earlier years had seemingly proved fruitless. Macgreegor was the only human being he could call friend.

"Ye're in a hurry," he now observed, and put the usual question: "Ha'e ye a fag on ye?"

Macgreegor obliged, saying as kindly as he could, "I'll maybe see ye later, Wullie."

"Thon girl again, I suppose."

"So long," said Macgreegor, shortly.

"Haud on a meenute. I want to speak to ye. Ha'e ye done it?"

"Ay, this mornin' . . . An' I'm gey busy."

"Ye should leave the weemen alane, an' then ye wud ha'e time to spare."

"What ha'e ye got to speak aboot?" Macgreegor impatiently demanded,

though he was in good time for his appointment.

"I was thinkin' o' enlistin'," said Willie.

"Oh!" cried his friend, interested. "Ye've changed yer mind, Wullie."

"I've been conseederin' it for a while back. Ye needna think *you* had onything to dae wi' it," said Willie.

"Ye've been drinkin' beer," his friend remarked, not accusingly, but merely by way of stating a fact.

"So wud you, if ye had ma aunt."

"Maybe I wud," Macgreegor sympathetically admitted.

"But ye couldna droon her in twa halfpints. Ach, I'm fed up wi' her. She startit yatterin' at me the nicht because I askit her for saxpence; so at last I tell't her I wud suner jine Kitchener's Army nor see her ugly face for anither week."

"What did she say?"

"Said it was the first guid notion ever I had."

"Weel," said Macgreegor eagerly, after a slight pause, "since ye're for enlistin', ye'd best dae it the nicht, Wullie."

"I suppose I micht as weel jine your lot," said Willie, carelessly.

Macgreegor drew himself up. "The 9th H.L.I. doesna accep' onything that offers."

"I'm as guid as you—an' I'm bigger nor you."

"Ye're bigger, but ye're peely-wally. Still, Wullie, I wud like fine to see ye in ma company."

"Ye've a neck on ye! *Your* company! . . . Aweel, come on an' see me dae it."

In the dusk Macgreegor peered at his watch. It told him that the thing could not be done, not if he ran both ways. "I canna manage it, Wullie," he said, with honest regret.

"Then it's off," the contrary William declared.

"What's off?"

"I've changed ma mind. I'm no for the sojerin'."

At this Macgreegor bristled, so to speak. He could stand being "codded," but already the Army was sacred to him.

"See here, Wullie, will ye gang an' enlist noo or tak' a hammerin'?"

"Wha'll gi'e me the hammerin'?"

"Come an' see," was the curt reply. Macgreegor turned back into the close and led the way to a small yard comprising some sooty earth, several blades of grass and a couple of poles for the support of clothes lines. A little light came from windows above. Here he removed his jacket, hung it carefully on a pole, and began to roll up his sleeves.

"It's ower dark here," Willie complained. "I canna see."

"Ye can feel. Tak' off yer coat."

Willie knew that despite his inches he was a poor match for the other, yet he was a stubborn chap. "What business is it o' yours whether I enlist or no?" he growled.

"Will ye enlist?"

"I'll see ye damp first!"

"Come on, then! Macgreegor spat lightly on his palms. "I've nae time to waste."

Willie cast his jacket on the ground. "I'll wrastle ye," he said, with a gleam of hope.

"Thank ye; but I'm no for dirtyin' ma guid claes. Come on!"

To Willie's credit, let it be recorded, he did come on, and so promptly that Masgreegor, scarcely prepared, had to take a light tap on the chin. A brief display of thoroughly unscientific boxing ensued, and then Macgreegor got home between the eyes. Willie, tripping over his own jacket, dropped to earth.

"I wasna ready that time," he grumbled, sitting up.

Macgreegor seized his hand and dragged him to his feet, with the encouraging remark, "Ye'll be readier next time."

In the course of the second round Willie achieved a smart clip on his opponent's ear, but next moment he received, as it seemed, an express train on the point of his nose, and straightway sat down in agony.

"Is't bled, Wullie?" Macgreegor presently inquired with compunction as well as satisfaction.

"It's near broke, ye swine!" groaned the sufferer, adding, "I kent fine ye wud bate me."

"What for did ye fecht then?"

"Nane o' your business."

"Weel, get up. Yer breeks'll get soakit sittin' there." The victor donned his jacket.

"Ma breeks is nane o' your business, neither."

"Ach, Wullie, dinna be a wean. Get up an' shake han's. I've got to gang."

"Gang then! Awa' an' boast to yer girl that ye hut a man on his nose behind his back——"

"Havers, man! What's wrang wi' ye?"

"I'll tell ye what's wrang wi' you, Macgreegor Robi'son! Willie cleared his throat noisily. "Listen! Ye're ower weel off. Ye've got a dacent faythe an' mither an' brither an' sister; ye've got a dacent uncle; ye've got a dacent girl . . . An' what the blazes ha'e I got? A rotten aunt! Maybe she canna help bein' rotten, but she is—damp rotten! She wud be gled, though she wud greet, if I got a bullet the morn. There ye are! That's me!"

"Wullie!" Macgreegor exclaimed, holding out his hand, which the other ignored.

"I'm rotten, tae," he went on, bitterly. "Fine I ken it. But I never had an equal chance wi' you. I'm no blamin' ye. Ye've aye shared me what ye had. I treated ye ill aboot the enlistin'. But I wasna gaun to enlist to please ye, nor ma aunt, neither." He rose slowly and picked up his shabby jacket. "But,

by——, I'll enlist to please masel'!" He held out his hand. "There it is, if ye want it, Macgreegor. . . . Ha'e ye a match? Weel, show a licht. Is ma nose queer-like?"

"Ay," Macgreegor unwillingly replied, and, with inspiration, added consolingly, "But it was aye that, Wullie."

IV

THE RING

"WHA' was chasin' ye?" Christina inquired, as Macgreegor came breathless to the counter, which she was tidying up for the night.

"I was feart I was gaun to be late," he panted.

"I wud ha'e excused ye under the unique circumstances," she said graciously. "Sit doon an' recover yer puff."

He took the chair, saying: "It was Wullie Thomson. He's awa' to enlist.

"Wullie Thomson! Weel, thats'a bad egg oot the basket. Hoo did ye manage it, Mac?"

"It wasna me," Macgreegor replied, not a little regretfully. "He's enlistin' to please hissel'. He says he's fed up wi' his aunt."

"She's been feedin' him up for a lang while, puir body. But ye're a queer lad," she said softly, "the way ye stick to a useless character like him. I was tellin' Miss Tod," she continued, "aboot ——"

"Oor engagement!" he burst out, scarlet.

"Whist, man!—ye've a wild imagination!—aboot ye enlistin'. She's been in a state o' patriotic tremulosity ever since. Dinna be surprised if she tries for to kiss ye."

"I wud be mair surprised," said Macgreegor, with unexpected boldness, "if you tried it."

"Naething could exceed ma ain amazement," she rejoined, "if I did."

"I've got the ring," he announced, his hand in his pocket.

"Order! Remember, I'm still at the receipt o' custom—three bawbees since seven o'clock."

"I hope ye'll like it," he said, reluc-

tantly withdrawing his hand empty. "Miss Tod canna hear us, can she?"

"Ye never can tell what a spinster'll hear when she's interested. At present she's nourishin' hersel' on tea—her nineteenth cup for the day; but she'll be comin' shortly to embrace ye an' shut the shop. I micht as weel get on ma hat. . . . An' what did yer parents say to ye?"

"They said ye was an awfu' nice, clever, bonny, handsome lassie——"

"Tit, tit! Aboot the enlistin', I meant. But I'll no ask ye that. They wud be prood, onyway."

"Ma uncle's raised ma wages, an' they're to be payed a' the time I'm awa'."

"Shakespeare! That's a proper uncle to ha'e! But dinna be tempted to stop awa' till ye're a millionaire. Oh, here's Miss Tod. Keep calm. She'll no bite ye."

The little elderly woman who entered

had made the acquaintance of Macgreegor in his early courting days, especially during the period wherein he had squandered his substance in purchases of innumerable and unnecessary lead pencils, etcetera, doubtless with a view to acquiring merit in her eyes as well as in her assistant's.

She now proceeded to hold his hand, patting it tenderly, while she murmured "brave lad" over and over again, to his exquisite embarrassment.

"But ye'll bate the enemy, dearie—and uphold the honor o' yer country—an' ye'll come marchin' hame a conductor or an inspector, or whatever they ca' it, wi' medals on yer breist an' riches in yer purse——"

"An' rings on his fingers an' bells——"

"Noo, noo, lassie, ye're no to mak' fun o' me! Whaur's his case?"

Christina handed her an aluminum cigarette case—the best in the shop—and she presented it to Macgreegor, saying:

"Ye're no to gang an' hurt yer health wi' smokin'; but when ye tak' a ceegarette, ye'll maybe gi'e a thocht to an auld body that'll be rememberin' ye, baith mornin' an' nicht."

"If he smokes his usual, he'll be thinkin' o' ye every twinty meenutes," remarked the girl, and drawing on her gloves, she came round to the door in order to close an interview which threatened to become lugubrious for all parties.

* * * * *

"Everybody's terrible kind," Macgreegor observed, when he found himself alone with Christina on the pavement. "Will ye look at the ring noo?"

She shook her head and stepped out briskly.

After a little while he revived. "I hope ye'll like it, Christina. It's got pearls on it. I hope it'll fit ye." A long pause. "I wish ye wud say something."

"What'll I say?"

"Onything. I never heard ye dumb afore."

"Maybe I'm reformin'."

"Christina!"

"That's ma name, but ye needna tell everybody."

"Dinna tease. We—we ha'e awfu' little time. Tak' aff yer glove an' try the ring. Naebody'll notice. Ye can look at it later on."

"I'm no in the habit o' acceptin' rings frae young men."

"But—but we're engaged."

"That's news, but I doobt it's no official."

"At least we're near engaged. Say we are, Christina!"

"This is most embarrassin', Mr. Robinson."

"Aw, Christina!" said the boy, helplessly.

She let him remain in silent suspence for several minutes, until, in fact, they turned into the quiet street

of her abode. Then she casually remarked—

"Ma han's gettin' cauld wantin' its glove, Mac."

He seized it joyfully and endeavoured to put the ring on. "It's ower wee!" he cried, aghast.

"That's ma middle finger."

It fitted nicely. Triumphantly he exclaimed: "*Noo* we're engaged!"

She had no rejoinder ready.

"Ye can tak' ma arm, if ye like," he said presently, just a little too confidently.

"I dinna feel in danger o' collapsin' at present," she replied, regarding the ring under the lamp they were passing. "Ye're an extravagant thing!" she went on. "I hope ye got it on appro."

"What—dae ye no like it?"

"I like the feel o' it," she admitted softly, "an' it's real bonny; but ye—ye shouldna ha'e done it Mac." She made as if to remove the ring.

He caught her hand. "But we're engaged!"

"Ye're ower sure o' that," she said a trifle sharply.

He stared at her.

"Firstly, I never said I wud tak' the ring for keeps," she proceeded. "Secondly, ye ha'ena seen ma uncle yet——"

"I'm no feart for him—if ye back me up. Him an' yer aunt'll dae onything ye like."

"Thirdly, ye ha'e never . . ." She broke off as they reached the close leading to her home.

"What ha'e I no done, Christina?"

"Never heed. . . . Leave go ma finger."

"Will ye keep the ring?"

"Hoo can I keep the ring when ye ha'e never . . ." Again the sentence was not completed. She freed her hand and stepped within the close.

"Tell me, an' I'll dae it, Christina," he cried.

She shook her head, smiling rather ruefully.

"Tell me," he pleaded.

"I canna—an' maybe ye wouldna' like me ony better if I could." She took off the ring and with a wistful glance at it offered it to him.

He took it, and before she knew, it was on her finger again.

"Ye've jist *got* to keep it!" he said, desperately. "An' Christina, I—I'm gaun to kiss ye!"

"Oh, mercy!"

But he had none . . .

"Are we engaged or no?" he whispered at last.

"Let me get ma breath."

"Hurry up!"

She laughed, though her eyes were wet. "Oh, dear," she murmured, "I never thought I wud get engaged wi'oot a—a . . ."

"A what?"

Suddenly she leaned forward and

touched his cheek. "Dinna fash yersel', Mac. Bein' in war-time, I suppose the best o' us has got to dae wi'oot some luxury or ither—sich as a proper High-Class Proposal."

V

IN UNIFORM

THERE happened to be a little delay in providing the later batches of recruits with the garb proper to their battalion, and it was the Monday of their third week in training when Privates Robinson—otherwise Macgreegor—and Thomson saw themselves for the first time in the glory of the kilt. Their dismay would doubtless have been overwhelming had they been alone in that glory; even with numerous comrades in similar distress they displayed much awkwardness and self-consciousness. During drill Willie received several cautions against standing in a semi-sitting attitude, and Macgreegor, in his anxiety to avoid his friend's error, made himself

ridiculous by standing on his toes, with outstretched neck and fixed, unhappy stare.

As if to intensify the situation, the leave for which they had applied a few days previously was unexpectedly granted for that evening. Before he realized what he was saying, Macgreegor had inquired whether he might go without his kilts. Perhaps he was not the first recruit to put it that way. Anyway, the reply was a curt, "I don't think."

"I believe ye're ashamed o' the uniform," said Willie, disagreeable under his own disappointment at the verdict.

"Say it again!" snapped Macgreegor.

Willie ignored the invitation, and swore by the great god Jings that he would assuredly wear breeks unless something happened. The only thing that may be said to have happened was that he did not wear breeks.

As a matter of fact, Macgreegor, with his sturdy figure, carried his kilt rather

well. The lanky William, however, gave the impression that he was growing out of it perceptibly, yet inevitably.

Four o'clock saw them started on their way, and with every step from the camp, which now seemed a lost refuge, their kilts felt shorter, their legs longer, their knees larger, their persons smaller. Conversation soon dried up. Willie whistled tunelessly through his teeth; Macgreegor kept his jaw set and occasionally and inadvertently kicked a loose stone. Down on the main road an electric car bound for Glasgow hove in sight. Simultaneously they started to run. After a few paces they pulled up, as though suddenly conscious of unseemliness, and resumed their sober pace—and lost the car.

They boarded the next, having sacrificed twelve precious minutes of their leave. Of course, they would never have dreamed of travelling "inside"— and yet . . . They ascended as gingerly as a pretty girl aware of ungainly ankles sur-

mounts a stile. Arrived safely on the roof, they sat down and puffed each a long breath suggestive of grave peril overcome. They covered their knees as far as they could and as surreptitiously as possible.

Presently, with the help of cigarettes, which they smoked industriously, they began to revive. Their lips were unsealed, though conversation could not be said to gush. They did their best to look like veterans. An old woman smiled rather sadly, but very kindly, in their direction, and Macgreegor reddened, while Willie spat in defiance of the displayed regulation.

As the journey proceeded, their talk dwindled. It was after a long pause that Willie said:

"Ye'll be for hame as sune as we get to Glesca—eh?"

"Ay. . . . An' you'll be for yer aunt's—eh?"

"Ay," Willie sighed, and lowering his

voice, said: "What'll ye dae if they laugh at ye?"

"They'll no laugh," Macgreegor replied, some indignation in his assurance.

"H'm! . . . Maybe *she'll* laugh at ye."

"Nae fears!" But the confident tone was overdone. Macgreegor, after all, was not quite sure about Christina. She laughed at so many things. He was to meet her at seven, and of late he had lost sleep wondering how she would receive his first appearance in the kilt. He dreaded her chaff more than any horrors of war that lay before him.

"Aw, she'll laugh, sure enough," croaked Willie. "I wud ha'e naething to dae wi' the weemen, if I was you. Ye canna trust them," added the misogynist of twenty summers.

Macgreegor took hold of himself. "What'll ye dae if yer aunt laughs?" he quietly demanded.

"Her? Gor! I never heard her laugh

yet—excep' in her sleep efter eatin' a crab. But by Jings, if she laughs at me, I—I'll gang oot an' ha'e a beer!"

"But ye've ta'en the pledge."

"—— I forgot aboot that. Weel, I —I'll wait an' see what she's got in for the tea first. . . . But she *canna* laugh. I'll bet ye a packet o' fags she greets."

"I'll tak' ye on!"

It may be said at once that the wager was never decided, for the simple reason that when the time came Willie refused all information—including the fact that his aunt had kissed him. Which is not, alas, to say that his future references to her were to be more respectful than formerly.

* * * * *

At three minutes before seven Macgreegor stood outside Miss Tod's little shop, waiting for the departure of a customer. It would be absurd to say that his knees shook, but it is a fact that his spirit trembled. Suspended from a finger of

his left hand was a small package of Christina's favourite sweets, which unconsciously he kept spinning all the time. His right hand was chiefly occupied in feeling for a pocket which no longer existed, and then trying to look as if it had been doing something entirely different. He wished the customer would "hurry up"; yet when she emerged at last, he was not ready. He was miserably, desperately afraid of Christina's smile, and just as miserably, desperately desirous to see it again.

Solemnly seven began to toll from a church tower. He pulled himself up. After all, why should she laugh? And if she did—well. . . .

Bracing himself, he strode forward, grasped the rattling handle and pushed. The little signal bell above the door went off with a monstrous "ding" that rang through his spine, and in a condition of feverish moistness he entered, and, halting a pace within, saw in blurred fashion,

and seemingly at a great distance, the loveliest thing he knew.

Christina did smile, but it was upon, not at, him. And she said lightly and by no means unkindly:

"Hullo, Mac! . . . Ye've had yer hair cut."

From sheer relief after the long strain, something was bound to give way. The string on his finger snapped and the package, reaching the floor, gaily exploded.

VI

THE LION OF THE EVENING

I'M fed up wi' pairties," was Macgreegor's ungracious response when informed at home of the latest invitation. "I dinna ask for leave jist for to gang to a rotten pairty."

"Ay, ye've mair to dae wi' yer leave," his father was beginning, with a wink, when his mother, with something of her old asperity, said:

"Macgreegor, that's no the way to speak o' pairties that folk gi'e in yer honour. An' you, John, should think shame o' yersel'. Ye should baith be sayin' it's terrible kind o' Mistress McOstrich to ask ye what nicht wud suit yer convenience."

Macgreegor regarded his mother almost as in the days when he addressed her as "Maw"—yet not quite. There was

a twinkle in his eye. Evidently she had clean forgotten he had grown up! Possibly she detected the twinkle and perceived her relapse, for she went on quickly—

"Though dear knows hoo Mistress McOstrich can afford to gi'e a pairty wi' her man's trade in its present condeetion."

"She's been daft for gi'ein' pairties since ever I can mind," Mr. Robinson put in, "an' the Kaiser hissel' couldna stop her. Still, Macgreegor, she's an auld frien', an' it wud be a peety to offend her. Ye'll be mair at hame there nor ye was at yer Aunt Purdie's swell affair. Dod, Lizzie, thon was a gorgeous banquet! I never tasted as much nor ett as little; I never heard sich high-class conversation nor felt liker a nap; I never sat on safter chairs nor looked liker a martyr on tin tacks."

Macgreegor joined in his father's guffaw, but stopped short, loyalty revolting. Aunt Purdie had meant it kindly.

"Tits, John!" said Lizzie, "ye got on fine excep' when ye let yer wine jeelly drap on the carpet."

"Oho, so there was wine in 't! I fancied it was inebriated-like. But the mistak' I made was in tryin' to kep it when it was descendin'. A duke wud jist ha'e let it gang as if a wine jeelly was naething to him. But, d'ye ken, wife, I was unco uneasy when I discovered the bulk o' it on ma shoe efter we had withdrew to the drawin' room——"

"Haud yer tongue, man! Macgreegor, what nicht'll suit ye?"

"If ye say a nicht, I'll try for it; but I canna be sure o' gettin' a late pass." He was the less uncertain when making appointments with Christina.

And Mr. Robinson once more blundered and caused his son to blush by saying: "He wud rayther spend the evenin' wi' his intended—eh, Macgreegor?"

"But she's to be invited!" Lizzie cried triumphantly. "So there ye are!"

"Ah, but that's no the same," John persisted, "as meetin' her quiet-like. When I was courtin' you, Lizzie, did ye no prefer——"

Lizzie ignored her man—the only way. "What aboot Friday, next week?"

"If we're no in Flanders afore then," reluctantly replied the soldier of seven weeks' standing.

* * * * *

Happily for Mrs. McOstrich's sake Macgreegor was able to keep the engagement, and credit may be given him for facing the wasted evening with a fairly cheerful countenance. Perhaps Christina, with whom he arrived a little late, did something to mitigate his grudge against the hostess.

Mrs. McOstrich was painfully fluttered by having a real live kiltie in her little parlour, which was adorned as heretofore with ornaments borrowed from the abodes of her guests. Though Macgreegor was acquainted with all the guests, she in-

sisted upon solemnly introducing him, along with his betrothed, to each individual with the formula: "This is Private Robi'son an' his intended."

While Macgreegor grinned miserably, Christina, the stranger, smiled sweetly, if a little disconcertingly.

Then the party settled down again to its sober pleasure. Macgreegor possessed a fairly clear memory of the same company in a similar situation a dozen years ago, but the only change which now impressed itself upon him was that Mr. Pumpherston had become much greyer, stouter, shorter of breath, and was no longer funny. And, as in the past, the prodigious snores of Mr. McOstrich, who still followed his trade of baker, sounded at intervals through the wall without causing the company the slightest concern, and were likewise no longer funny.

After supper, which consisted largely of lemonade and pastries, the hostess requested her guests, several being well-

nigh torpid, to attend to a song by Mr. Pumpherston. No one (excepting his wife) wanted to hear it, but the Pumpherston song had become traditional with the McOstrich entertainments. One could not have the latter without the former.

"He's got a new sang," Mrs. Pumpherston intimated with a stimulating glance round the company, "an' he's got a tunin' fork, forbye, that saves him wrastlin' for the richt key, as it were. Tune up, Geordie!"

Mr. Pumpherston deliberately produced the fork, struck it on his knee, winced, muttered "dammit," and gazed upwards. Not so many years ago Macgreegor would have exploded; to-night he was occupied in trying to find Christina's hand under the table.

"Doh, me, soh, doh, soh, me, doh," hummed the vocalist.

Christina, who had been looking desperately serious, let out a small squeak

and hurriedly blew her nose. Macgreegor regarded her in astonishment, and she withdrew the little finger she had permitted him to capture.

"It's a patriotic sang in honour," Mrs. Pumpherston started to explain——

"Ach, woman!" cried her spouse, "ye've made me loss ma key. He re-struck the fork irritably, and then proceeded to inform the company— "It's no exac'ly a new sang, but——"

"Ye'll be lossin' yer key again, Geordie."

With a sulky grunt, Mr. Pumpherston once more struck his fork, but this time discreetly on the leg of his chair, and in his own good time made a feeble attack on "Rule Britannia."

"This is fair rotten," Macgreegor muttered at the third verse, resentful that his love should be apparently enjoying it.

"Remember ye're a sojer," she whispered back, "an' thole." But she let him find her hand again.

The drear performance came to an end amid applause sufficient to satisfy Mrs. Pumpherston.

"Excep' when ye cracked on 'arose,' ye managed fine," she said to her perspiring mate, and to the hostess, "What think ye o' that for a patriotic sang, Mistress McOstrich?"

"Oh, splendid—splendid!" replied Mrs. McOstrich with a nervous start. For the last five minutes she had been lost in furtive contemplation of her two youthful guests, her withered countenance more melancholy even than usual.

Ten o'clock struck, and, to Macgreegor's ill-disguised delight, Christina rose and said she must be going.

Mrs. McOstrich accompanied the two to the outer door. There she took Christina's hand, stroked it once or twice, and let it go.

"Macgreegor has been a frien' o' mines since he was a gey wee laddie," she said, "an' I'm rael prood to ha'e had his in-

tended in ma hoose. I'll never forget neither o' ye. If I had had a laddie a' ma ain, I couldna ha'e wished him to dae better nor Macgreegor has done—in every way." Abruptly she pressed something into Christina's hand and closed the girl's fingers upon it. "Dinna look at it noo," she went on hastily. "It's yours, dearie, but ye'll gi'e it to Macgreegor when the time comes for him to—to gang. Ma grandfayther was a dandy in his way, an' it's a' he left me, though I had great expectations."

Gently she pushed the pair of them forth and closed the door.

At the foot of the stair, under a feeble gas-jet, Christina opened her hand, disclosing an old-fashioned ring set with a blood-stone.

"Ye never tell't me she was like that," the girl said softly, yet a little accusingly.

"I never thought," muttered he, truthfully enough.

VII

WILLIE STANDS UP

IT is not the most roughly nurtured of us who will rough it the most cheerfully. Willie Thomson, of harsh and meagre up-bringing, was *the* grumbler of his billet. He found fault with the camp fare, accommodation and hours in particular, with the discipline in general. Yet, oddly enough, after a fortnight or so, he seemed to accept the physical drill at 7 a.m. with a sort of dour satisfaction, though he never had a good word to say for it.

His complaints at last exasperated Macgreegor, who, on a certain wet evening, when half the men were lounging drearily within the billet, snapped the question:

"What the blazes made ye enlist?"

The answer was unexpected. "You!"

"Ye're a leear!"

With great deliberation Willie arose from the bench on which he had been reclining. He spat on the floor and proceeded to unbutton his tunic.

"Nae man," he declared, as if addressing an audience, "calls me that twicet!"

"Wudna be worth his while," said his friend, carelessly.

"I challenge ye to repeat it."

The tone of the words caused Macgreegor to stare, but he said calmly enough: "Either ye was a leear the nicht ye enlisted, or ye're a leear noo. Ye can tak' yer ch'ice."

"An' you can tak' aff yer coat!"

"I dinna need to undress for to gi'e ye a hammerin', if that's what ye're efter. But I'm no guan to dae it here. We'd baith get into trouble."

"Ye're henny," said Willie.

Macgreegor was more puzzled than

angry. Here was Willie positively asking for a punching in public!

"What's wrang wi' ye, Wullie?" he asked in a lowered voice. "Wait till we get oor next leave. The chaps here'll jist laugh at ye."

"It'll maybe be you they'll laugh at. Come on, ye cooard!"

By this time the other fellows had become interested and one of them, commonly called Jake, the oldest in the billet, came forward.

"What's up, Grocer?" he inquired of Macgreegor, who had early earned his nickname thanks to Uncle Purdie's frequent consignments of dainties, which were greatly appreciated by all in the billet.

"He's aff his onion," said Macgreegor, disgustedly.

"He says I'm a leear," said Willie, sullenly.

Jake's humorous mouth went straight, not without apparent effort.

"Weel," he said slowly, judicially, "it's

maybe a peety to fecht aboot a trifle like that, an' we canna permit kickin', clawin' an' bitin' in this genteel estayblishment; but seein' it's a dull evenin', an' jist for to help for to pass the time, I'll lend ye ma auld boxin' gloves, an' ye can bash awa' till ye're wearit. Sam!" he called over his shoulder, 'fetch the gloves, an' I'll see fair play . . . I suppose, Grocer, ye dinna want to apologeese."

Macgreegor's reply was to loosen his tunic. He was annoyed with himself and irritated by Willie, but above all he resented the publicity of the affair.

With mock solemnity Jake turned to Willie. "In case o' yer decease, wud ye no like to leave a lovin' message for the aunt we've heard ye blessin' noo an' then?"

"To pot wi' her!" muttered Willie.

A high falsetto voice from the gathering audience cried: "Oh, ye bad boy, come here till I skelp ye!"—and there was a general laugh, in which the hapless object did not join.

"Ach, dinna torment him," Macgreegor said impulsively.

While willing hands fixed the gloves on the combatants the necessary floor space was cleared. There were numerous offers of the services of seconds, but the self-constituted master of ceremonies, Jake, vetoed all formalities.

"Let them dae battle in their ain fashion," said he. "It'll be mair fun for us. But it's understood that first blood ends it. Are ye ready, lads? Then get to work. Nae hittin' ablow the belt."

By this time Macgreegor was beginning to feel amused. The sight of Willie and himself in the big gloves tickled him.

"Come on, Wullie," he called cheerfully.

"Am I a leear?" Willie demanded.

"Ye are!—but ye canna help it."

"I can if I like!" yelled Willie, losing his head. "Tak' that!"

A tremendous buffet with the right

intended for Macgreegor's nose caught his forehead with a sounding whack.

Thus began an extraordinary battle in which there was little attempt at dodging, less at guarding and none at feinting. Each man confined his attentions to his opponent's face and endeavored to reach the bull's eye, as it were, of the target, though that point was not often attained, and never with spectacular effect. Ere long, however, Macgreegor developed a puffiness around his left eye while Willie exhibited a swelling lip. Both soon were pouring out sweat. They fought with frantic enthusiasm and notable waste of energy.

The audience laughed itself into helplessness, gasping advice and encouragement to each with a fine lack of favouritism.

"Wire in, wee yin! Try again, pipe-shanks! Weel hit, Grocer! That had him, Wullie!—ye'll be a corporal afore yer auntie! Haw, Mac, that was a knock-

oot, if it had struck! Cheer up, Private Thomson; gi'e him the kidney punch on his whuskers! Guid stroke, Grocer!—fair on his goods' entrance! We'll be payin' for to see ye in pictur' hooses yet—the Brithers Basher! Gor, this is better nor a funeral! Keep it up, lads!" And so forth.

But it was far too fast to last. A few minutes, and both were utterly pumped. As though with mutual agreement, they paused, panting. Neither had gained any visible advantage.

"Nae blood yet," remarked someone in tones of regret mingled with hope.

"Never heed," interposed Jake, humanely. "Tak' off their gloves. They've done enough. We'll ca' it a draw—or to be conteenued in oor next dull evenin'—whichever they like. I hope you twa lads 'll never learn scienteefic boxin'. There's ower little fun in the warld nooadays."

Neither offered any resistance to the removal of the gloves.

"Shake han's, lads," said Jake.

To Macgreegor's surprise Willie's hand was out before his own.

"I'm a leear if ye like," said Willie, still panting, "but I can stan' up to ye noo!"

"So ye can," Macgreegor admitted—a little reluctantly perhaps, for he had long been used to being the winner.

"If I wasna teetotal," Willie added in a burst of generosity, "I wud stan' ye a drink."

VIII

CORRESPONDENCE

Macgreegor to Christina

MY DEAR CHRISTINA,—

I was looking for your letter the whole of yesterday, but it did not come till this morning at 8.35 a.m., and I am sorry to say it is not near as nice as I expected. Some parts is niceish, but others is rotten. What for do you ask me if I have spotted many pretty girls here, when you know I would not be for taking the troubble of spoting any girl in the world but you, and besides they are all terrible ugly here. Yesterday I seen 2 that made me feel sick. Wullie said they was on for being picked up, and he give a wink at one of them, and she put out her tongue at him, but no more happened. They was quite

young girls, though hiddeous, but Wullie did not seem to mind their faces ["mugs" scored out].

Wullie is greatly changed since the last few weeks. You would scarcely know him, he is that fond of exercises. He is near as strong as me. They are telling him he will be a corporal before his aunt, and he gets huffy. He spoke too much about his aunt at the beginning, cursing and swearing like, and now he can't get away from it, poor sole. It is a pity she does not send him some small presents now and then. He is awful jealous of the chaps that get things from home; you can tell it by his face and the bad language he uses about the billet and the Zeppelins for 2 hours after. So just for fun, when I was writing to Uncle Purdie, I said please send the next parcel addressed to Pte. Wm. Thomson. Wullie got it last night. He never let on he was pleased, but he was. He was freer nor I expected him to be with the gro-

ceries, but he eat a tin of salmon all by his lone, and in the middle of the night, at 3.15 a.m., he was took horrid bad, and 7 of the chaps made him take their private meddicines, and he could not turn out for physical exercise in the morning, but is now much better, and has made a good tea, and is eating 1 lb. cokernut lozenges at this very minute.

I have no more news. But, dear Christina, I am not well pleased with your letter at all. I am quite disconsoled about it. It makes me feel like wet cold feet that has no hopes of ever getting dry cosy again. When I seen yourself last Friday night I was not feared for anything, for you was that kind and softhearted, and you laughed that gentle and pretty, and your words did sound sweet even when they was chaffing-like. But now I am fearing something has gone wrong. Are you offended? I did not mean to do so. Have you got tired of me? I would think *yes* at once if you

was the common sort of girl, but you are the honest sort that would tell me straight, and not with hints in a letter. So if you are not offended, I think you must have catched a cold in your head, or got something wrong with your inside. Colds in the head is very permanent [?prevalent] in the billet for the present, and the chaps with them are ready to bite your nose off if you say a word to them.

Dear, dear Christina, please tell me what is the matter. I will not sleep well till I hear from you. The stew for dinner to-day was better than the stew yesterday, but I could not take my usual. I am fed up with anxiousness. Kindly write by return. Why do you never put any x x x in your letters? Do you want me to stop putting them in mine?

Your aff. intended,

M. Robinson.

P.S.—It is not to be the Dardanelles,

but we are likely going to Flanders next week. Excuse writing and spelling as usual. x x x Please write at once.

Christina to Macgreegor

DEAR SIR,—

Your esteemed favour duly to hand and contents noted. I deeply regret that my last communication did not meet with your unmitigated approval, but oh, dear wee Mac, I could not write a lovey-dovey letter to save my only neck. In my youth, when penny novels were my sole mental support, I used to see myself pouring forth screeds of beauteous remarks to an adoring swine 6½ ft. high x 2¾ ft. broad. But now it can't be done. Still, I am sorry if my letter hurt you. It was never meant to do that, lad. You must learn to take my chaff and other folks' unseriously. Honest, if I had been really thinking of you along with other girls, I would not have mentioned it. I'm not that sort of girl, and I'm not the sort that gets cold

in the head, either, thanking you all the same for kind enquiries. But I'm by no means faultless. I get what the novelists call flippant when I am feeling most solemn. I was a bit down-hearted when I wrote last, for your letter had said "Dardanelles." Now you say "Flanders," which is no better, but I am not going to cry this time. Surely they won't send you away so soon, dear.

Glad to hear Willie is greatly changed, and I hope he will keep on changing, though I could never admire a man that ate a whole tin of salmon in once. I'm sure the two girls were not so dreadfully plain as you report. Had they got their hair up? Girls don't usually put out their tongues at young men after their hair is up, so I presume they were *very* young. It was like you to ask your uncle to send Willie the parcel.

Miss Tod is not so brisk just now. The doctor says she must either drink less tea or become a chronic dyspepto-

maniac. She prefers the latter. Poor old thing, her joys are few and simple! Trade is not so bad. A new line in poetical patriotical postcards is going well. The poetry is the worst yet.

I am sending you some cigarettes with my uncle's best wishes and a pair of socks with mine. Perhaps you have enough socks from home already. If so, give them to W. T., and ask him from me to practise blushing. He can begin by winking at himself in a mirror thrice daily.

When are you going to get leave again? Miss Tod says I can get away at 6, any night I want to. No; I don't want you to stop putting those marks in your letters. If you can find one in this letter, you may take it, and I hope it will make you half as happy as I want you to be. Good-night.

CHRISTINA.

IX

THE FAT GIRL

NEVER a day passed without its camp rumour. If Macgreegor was disposed to be over-credulous, his friend Willie was sceptical enough for two.

"I hear we're for the Dardanelles next week," the former observed one afternoon.

Willie snorted. "What the —— wud they send us yins to the Dardanelles afore we ken hoo to fire a rifle?"

"I heard it for a fac'," Macgreegor returned imperturbably. "They want us yins for bay'net work, no for snipin'."

"Bay'net work! I'll bet ye fifty fags I get a dizzen Turks on ma bay'net afore ye get twa on yours!"

Macgreegor let the boastful irrelevance pass. "I wonder," he said, thoughtfully,

"if we'll get extra leave afore we gang."

"Plenty o' leave! Keep yer mind easy, Macgreegor. It's a million in gold to a rotten banana we never get a bash at onybody. It's fair putrid to think o' a' the terrible hard work we're daein' here to nae purpose. I wishst I was deid! Can ye len' us a bob?"

"I hae'na got it, Wullie; honest."

Willie sadly shook his head. "That moll o' yours," said he, "is awfu' expensive. Ye've nae notion o' managin' weemen. Listen, an' I'll tell ye something. Ye mind last Monday? Weel, I had a late pass that nicht, an' I thocht I wud miss seein' ma aunt's ugly for wance —though it meant missin' a guid meal forbye. So when I got to Glesca I picked up thon fat girl we used to fling rubbish at when we was young. An', by jings, she was pleased an' prood! She stood me ma tea, includin' twa hot pies, an' she gi'ed me a packet o' fags—guid quality, mind ye!—an' she peyed for firstclass

sates in a pictur' hoose! That's hoo to dae it, ma lad!" he concluded complacently.

"An' what did you gi'e her?" Macgreegor inquired, after a pause.

"Ma comp'ny, likewise some nice fresh air fried in naething, for I took her for a short walk. I could manage wi' ninepence."

"Ach, I didna think ye was as mean as that, Wullie! Was—was she guid-lookin'?"

"I didna notice her face a great deal; but she's a beezer for stootness. I'm gaun to meet her again on ma next leave. If I tell her we've orders for the Dardanelles, there's nae guessin' what she'll dae for me."

"She maun be unco saft," Macgreegor commented pityingly.

"Maybe the kilt had something to dae wi' it," Willie modestly allowed. "They a' adore the kilt. Can ye no spare saxpence . . . weel, thruppence?"

"I could spare ye a bat on the ear, but I'll tell ye what I'll dae. I've got some money comin' the morn, an' I'll present ye wi' twa bob, if ye'll tak' yer oath to spend them baith on gi'ein' the fat yin a treat."

Willie gasped. "D'ye think I'm completely mad?"

"There's something wrang wi' ye when ye can sponge aff a girl, even supposin' she's fat. So ye can tak' ma offer or a dashed guid hammerin' when the first chance comes."

"Dinna be sae free wi' yer hammerin's, ma lord! Remember, it was a draw the last time."

"I wasna angry, an' I had gloves on."

Willie considered for a moment and decided to compromise.

"I'll burst a bob on her to please ye."

"Twa—or a hammerin'."

"But what guid is the siller gaun to dae me, if I squander it a' on her? Ye micht as weel fling it in the Clyde. *She's* no

wantin' that sort o' kindness frae me. She prefers a bit cuddle."

"Did ye cuddle her?" Macgreegor asked with an interest indifferently concealed.

"Some o' her. But she's earnin' guid money at the ——"

"I dinna suppose she wud ha'e treated ye excep' she had mair money nor brains."

"She wud pairt wi' her last farden for ma sake!"

"Ach, awa' an' eat grass! It's weel seen that men are scarce the noo."

"Mind wha ye're insultin'!"

"I'm gaun up to the billet," Macgreegor said, shortly, and walked off.

Presently, Willie, a new idea in his busy brain, overtook him.

"Macgreegor, if ye len' me thruppence the noo, I'll ca' it a bargain aboot the twa bob."

He got the pennies then, and on the following day a florin, upon which he took a solemn oath. But as he fingered the

silver later he smiled secretly and almost serenely. If the fat girl had stood him a substantial meal, cigarettes and a picture entertainment for nothing, what might not he expect as a return for the squandering of two shillings?

As for Macgreegor, his motives were probably not unmixed: the pleasure which he foresaw for the poor, fat girl was contingent on the agony of Willie while spending good money on a person other than himself.

However, Willie was not long in securing a late pass, and went upon his jaunt in an apparently chastened state of mind, though in the best possible humour.

He returned in the worst possible.

"Twa bob clean wasted," he grunted, squatting down by Macgreegor's bed. "I wish I had flung it in the Clyde when we was crossin' the brig."

"What gaed wrang?" inquired Macgreegor, rubbing his eyes. "Did she no like yer treat?"

"I'll warrant she did!"

"What did ye buy her wi' the twa bob?"

Willie sniffed at his recollections. "Like a silly goat," said he, "I askit her what she wud like best for twa bob, me thinkin' naterally she wud say a feed to stairt wi'. I was ready for a feed masel'. But she squeezed ma arm an' shoved her big face intil mines, an' said she wud like a sooveneer best. To blazes wi' sooveneers! An' she dragged me awa' to a shop, an' I had to buy her a silly-like wee tie that cost me eichteenpence-ha'penny; an' then she wanted a lang ride on the car, an' that bust fivepence; an' she nabbed the remainin' bawbee for a keepsake." The reciter paused as if from exhaustion.

"Hurry up!" said Macgreegor encouragingly. "What did she gi'e you?"

"Just a kiss up a close! To pot wi' kissin'! An' then she said she was afraid her mither wud be waitin' the ham an' egg supper for her, so she wud need to run, an' she was vexed she couldna meet

me again because she had been hearin' I was a terrible bad character. An' then, takin' advantage o' ma surprise, she done a bunk. . . . An' if ever I ha'e ony mair truck wi' weemen, may I be hanged."

"She wasna as saft as I thocht she was," remarked Macgreegor in an uncertain voice. "So ye wud jist gang to yer aunt's for yer supper, efter a'?"

"Ay! An' the auld cat was oot at a prayer-meetin'. I ha'ena had a bite in ma mooth since dinner-time. Ha'e ye onything o' yer uncle's handy?"

"I can gi'e ye a wee tin' o' corned beef, Wullie. Ye ken whaur to find it."

"Least ye can dae," Willie growled. "Thenk Heaven it was your money!"

"I'm thinkin' I've got guid value."

"What?"

"Guid nicht!" And stuffing some blanket into his mouth, Macgreegor rolled over and quaked with imprisoned mirth.

X

THE ALARM

IT came, as Christina would have expressed it in her early days, like a "blot from the blue." On a certain fine morning, while battalion drill was in progress, a mounted officer dashed upon the scene and was forthwith engaged in earnest conversation with the colonel. The news was evidently urgent, and it was received with an obvious gravity. A thrill ran through the ranks; you would have fancied you heard breaths of anticipation.

A minute later the companies were making for camp at the double. Arrived there they were instructed to repair to billets and, with all speed, pack up. And presently ammunition was being served

out, a hundred rounds to each man; and, later, "iron" rations.

"We're awa' noo!" gasped Macgreegor, recovering forcibly from Willie's greedy clutch a pair of socks knitted by Christina.

"Ay, we're awa'; an' I'll bet ye we're for Flanders," said Willie, no less excited.

"Dardanelles!" shouted Macgreegor, above the din that filled the ' 'let.

"Flanders!" yelled Willie, w..dly, and started to dance—unfortunately upon a thin piece of soap.

"Dardanelles!" Macgreegor repeated as he gave his friend a hand up.

"Oh!" groaned Willie, rubbing the back of his head. "But what'll ye bet?"

"What ha'e ye got?"

"I'll bet ye thruppence—the thruppence ye lent me the day afore yesterday."

"Done! If ye win, we'll be quits; if ye loss——"

"Na, na! If I win, ye'll ha'e to pay me——"

"Ach, I've nae time to listen to ye. I've twa letters to write."

"Letters! What aboot the bet?"

"Awa' an' chase yersel'! Are ye no gaun to drap a line to yer aunt?"

"No dashed likely! She's never sent the postal order I asked her for. If I had got it, I wud ha' payed what I'm owin' ye, Macgreegor. By heavens, I wud! I'll t k' ma oath I——"

"Awee, never heed aboot that," Macgreegor said, soothingly. "Send her a post caird an' let me get peace for three meenutes."

"Ye canna get peace in this," said Willie, with a glance round the tumultuous billet.

"I can—if ye haud yer silly tongue." Macgreegor thereupon got his pad and envelopes (a gift from Miss Tod), squatted on his bed, and proceeded to gnaw his pencil. The voice of the sergeant was heard ordering the men to hurry up.

"I'll tell ye what I'll dae," said Willie,

sitting down at his friend's elbow. "I'll bet ye a' I owe ye to a bob it's Flanders. Ye see, I'll maybe get shot, an' I dinna want to dee in debt. An' I'll send the auld cat a caird wi' something nice on it, to please ye. . . . Eh?"

"Aw, onything ye like, but for ony sake clay up! Shift!" cried the distracted Macgreegor.

"Weel gi'e's a fag . . . an' a match," said Willie.

He received them in his face, but merely grinned as he languidly removed himself.

The two scrawls so hastily and under such difficulties produced by Macgreegor are sacred. He would never write anything more boyish and loving, nor yet more manly and brave, than those "few lines" to his mother and sweetheart. There was no time left for posting them when the order came to fall in, but he anticipated an opportunity at one of the stations on the journey south.

Out in the sunshine stood the hundreds

of lads whose training had been so brief that some carried ammunition for the first time. There were few grave faces, though possibly some of the many grins were more reflected than original. Yet there was a fine general air of eagerness, and at the word "attention" the varied expressions gave place to one of determination.

Boom! boom! boom! . . . Boom! boom! boom! Dirl and skirl; skirl and dirl! So to the heart-lifting, cheer-raising music of pipes and drums they marched down to the railway.

At the station it seemed as though they had been expected to break all records in military entraining. There was terrific haste and occasional confusion, the latter at the loading of the vans. The enthusiasm was equalled only by the perspiration. But at last everything and nearly everybody was aboard, and the rumour went along that they had actually broken such and such a battalion's record.

Private William Thomson, however,

had already started his inevitable grumbling. There were eight in the compartment, and he had stupidly omitted to secure a corner seat.

"I'll bet ye I'm a corp afore we get to Dover," he bleated.

"That's as near as ever ye'll be to bein' a corporal," remarked the cheerful Jake. "But hoo d'ye ken it'll be Dover?"

"I'll bet ye——Na! I'll no tak' on ony mair wagers. I've a tremenjous bet on wi' this yin"—indicating Macgreegor—"every dashed penny I possess—that we're boun' for Flanders. He says the Dardanelles."

All excepting Macgreegor fell to debating the question. He had just remembered something he had forgotten to say to Christina; also, he was going away without the ring she was to have given him. He was not sorry he was going, but he felt sad. . . .

The debate waxed furious.

"I tell ye," bawled Willie, "we're for

Flanders! The Ninth's been there since the——"

A sudden silence! What was that? Surely not—ay, it was!—an order to detrain!

And soon the whisper went round that they were not bound for anywhere—unless it were the old camp. The morning's alarm and all that followed had been merely by way of practice.

At such a time different men have different feelings, or, at least, different ways of expressing them. Jake laughed philosophically and appeared to dismiss the whole affair. Willie swore with a curious and seemingly unnecessary bitterness, at frequent intervals, for the next hour or so. Macgreegor remained in a semi-stunned condition of mind until the opportunity came for making a little private bonfire of the two letters; after which melancholy operation he straightway recovered his usual good spirits.

"Never heed, Wullie," he said, later; "we'll get oor chance yet."

Willie exploded. "What for did ye get me to mak' sic a ——— cod o' masel'?"

"Cod o' yersel'? Me?"

"Ay, you!—gettin' me to send a caird to ma ——— aunt! What for did ye dae it?"

Macgreegor stared. "But ye didna post it," he began.

"Ay, but I did. I gi'ed it to a man at the station."

"Oh! . . . Weel, ye'll just ha'e to send her anither."

"That'll no mak' me less o' a cod."

"What way? What did ye write on the caird?"

Willie hesitated, muttered a few curses, and said slowly yet savagely:

" 'Off to Flanders, wi'—wi' kind love' *oh,* ——— *it!*"

XI

AN INVITATION

AFTER considering the matter at intervals for about thirty years, Miss Tod, Christina's employer, decided to take a short change of air by accepting the long-standing invitation of an old and aged friend who dwelt in the country. The hour of departure arriving, she shed tears, expressed the fear that she was going to her death, embraced the girl, handed her the keys of the premises, and requested her to make any use she pleased of the rather stuffy living-room behind the shop.

Christina had no notion of accepting the offer until, an hour or two later, the idea struck her that it would be fun to give a little tea party for Macgreegor and Willie Thomson. She knew Willie but

slightly, but though her respect was no greater than her knowledge, she had kept a softish corner for him since the day, two years ago, when he had gone out of his way to inform her, imprudently enough, that his friend Macgreegor was *not* courting a certain rather bold and attractive damsel called Jessie Mary.

So she wrote forthwith to Macgreegor and enclosed the following invitation, in her neatest writing, for his friend:

Miss Christina Baldwin requests
the unspeakable pleasure of
Pte. William Thomson's company
to T. T. Tea
on the first evening possible
(Sunday excepted) at 5.30
precisely till 7 prompt.
Menu.
Sandwiches, Sausage Rolls,
Hot Cookies, Cream Dittos,
Macaroons, Cheesecakes,
Currant Cakes, Jam Puffs,
Imperial (*née* German) Biscuits,
And
NO BREAD.
God Save the King!
P.S.—Miss C. B. will expect
Pte. W. T. to Ask a Blessing.

It took time and patience on Macgreegor's part to persuade his friend that the missive was not a "cod"; but once convinced of its genuineness, Willie took the business seriously. He swore, however, to have nothing to do with the matter of the P.S. Nevertheless, in moments of solitude, his lips might have been observed to move diligently, and it is possible that he was mentally rehearsing "For what we are about to receive, etc." His written acceptance was a model in its way.

"Coming with thanks.—Yours truly, W. THOMSON."

By the same post he wrote to his aunt —for cash; but her reply consisting of a tract headed with a picture of a young man in the remnants of a bath towel dining in a pig-sty, he was compelled once more to appeal to Macgreegor, who fortunately happened to be fairly flush. He expended the borrowed shilling on a cane and a packet of Breath Perfumers for

himself, and for Christina a box of toffee which, being anhungered when on sentry duty the same night, he speedily devoured with more relish than regret.

Unless we reckon evenings spent in Macgreegor's home in the small-boy period, and a funeral or two, Willie's experience of tea parties was nil. Despite his frequently expressed contempt for such "footerin' affairs," he was secretly flattered by Christina's invitation. At the same time, he suffered considerable anguish of mind on account of his ignorance of the "fancy behaviour" which he deemed indispensable in the presence of a hostess whom he considered "awfu' genteel." With reluctance, but in sheer desperation, he applied to his seldom-failing friend.

"What the blazes," he begun with affected unconcern, "dae ye dae at a tea pairty?"

"Eat an' jaw," came the succinct reply.

"But what dae ye jaw aboot?"

"Onything ye like—as long as ye leave oot the bad language."

"I doot I'll no ha'e muckle to say," sighed Willie.

"She'll want to hear aboot the camp an' so on," Macgreegor said, by way of encouragement.

"But that'll be piper's news to her. You've tell't her——"

"I've never had the time."

Willie gasped. "What dae you an' her jaw aboot?"

"Nane o' your business!"

"Haw, haw!" laughed Willie, mirthlessly. "My! but ye're a spoony deevil! —nae offence intendit." The apology was made hastily owing to a sudden change in Macgreegor's expression and colour.

Macgreegor lit a cigarette and returned his well-stocked aluminum case to his pocket.

The silence was broken by Willie.

"Savin' up?"

"Ay."

"It's a dashed bad habit, Macgreegor. Dinna let it grow on ye. If naebody saved up, everybody wud be weel off. . . . Aweel, what maun be maun be." And, groaning, Private Thomson drew forth a packet which his friend had "stood" him the previous day. "Regairdin' this tea pairty," he resumed, "are ye supposed to eat a' ye can an' leave what ye canna—if there's onything to leave?"

"She'll expect ye to eat a' ye can."

"It's easy seen she doesna ken me."

"Oh, she'll be prepared for the worst, Wullie," said Macgreegor, his good-humour returned. "I can shift a bit masel' when I'm in form."

Whereat Willie's countenance was illuminated by a happy thought. "I'll bet ye a sixpence I'll shift mair nor you!"

Macgreegor laughed and shook his head. "If you an' me was gaun oor lone to a restewrant, I wud tak' ye on: but——"

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"Aw, ye mean it wudna be the thing at a tea pairty?"

"Hardly."

"Weel, weel," said Willie, with sorry resignation, "honest money's ill to earn. It wud ha'e been a snip for me. Ha'e ye a match?" Having lit up: "Tell us what else I maunna dae at the pairty."

Macgreegor scratched his head. "If it had been a denner pairty," he said slowly, thinking doubtless of Aunt Purdie's, "I could ha'e gi'ed ye a queer list; but ye canna gang far wrang at a tea pairty."

"I dinna want to gang an inch wrang."

"Weel, then, for instance, some folk objec's to a chap sookin' his tea frae his saucer——"

"I'll note that. Fire awa'!"

"An' if a cream cookie bursts——"

"Dae they burst whiles?"

"Up yer sleeve, as a rule," said Macgreegor very solemnly.

"I'll pass the cream cookies."

"But they're awfu' tasty."

"Are they? . . . Weel, what dae ye dae if it bursts?"

"Never let bug."

"Ay, but—but what aboot the cream."

"Best cairry an extra hanky an' plug yer sleeve wi' it."

After a dismal pause, Willie inquired: "Could ye no get her to leave the cream cookies oot o' her programme, Macgreegor?"

Macgreegor looked dubious. "She's gey saft on them hersel', an' she micht be offendit if we refused them. Of course they dinna scoot up the sleeve every time."

"Oh!"—more hopefully.

"Whiles they explode down the waistcoat—I mean tunic."

"That's enough!" wailed Willie. "If the Clyde was handy, I wud gang an' droon masel'!"

On the third day following, they ob-

tained late passes. Willie's uneasiness was considerable, yet so was his vanity. He affected an absurdly devil-may-care deportment which so stirred Macgreegor's sense of pity that he had thoughts of taking back what he had said about the cream cookies. But at the last moment his bootlace snapped. . . .

Willie's toilet was the most careful he had ever made, and included an application of exceeding fragrant pomade pilfered from his corporal's supply and laid on thickly enough to stop a leak. Finally, having armed himself with his new cane and put seven breath perfumers and a cigarette in his mouth, he approached the stooping Macgreegor and declared himself ready for the road.

"What's that atrocious stink?" demanded Macgreegor, with unwonted crustiness.

For once in his life Willie had no answer at hand, and for once he blushed.

XII

A TEA-PARTY

CHRISTINA was serving a customer when her two guests entered the shop. Unembarrassed she beamed on both and signed to Macgreegor to go "right in." So Macgreegor conducted his friend, who during the journey had betrayed increasing indications of "funk," into the absent owner's living-room, which Christina had contrived to make brighter looking than for many a year.

At the sight of the laden table Willie took fright and declared his intention of doing an immediate "slope." "Ye didna tell me," he complained, "there was to be a big comp'ny."

Macgreegor grabbed him by the arm. "Keep yer hair on, Wullie. There'll be

naebody but the three o' us. There's nae scrimp aboot Christina," he added with pride.

"I believe ye!" responded the reassured guest. "Gor, I never seen as much pastries in a' ma born days—no but what I'm ready to dae ma bit."

Just then Christina entered remarking:

"It's an awfu' job tryin' to sell what a person doesna want to a person that wants what ye ha'ena got; but I done it this time. Evenin', Mac. Mr. Thomson, I am delighted to meet ye."

"Aw," murmured Willie helplessly.

"Dinna terrify him," Macgreegor whispered.

"Sorry," she said with quick compunction. "I'm gled to see ye, Wullie. Sit doon an' feel at hame. The kettle's jist at the bile. See, tak' Miss Tod's chair. She'll like to think that a sojer sat in it. She'll never ha'e been as near to a man. I was askin' her the ither nicht if she had

ever had a lad. The answer was in the negative.

"Maybe," Macgreegor suggested, "she didna like to tell ye the truth."

Christina smiled gently, saying, "Ye've a lot to learn aboot us females, Mac."

"By Jings, ye're richt there! Willie exploded, and immediately subsided in confusion.

"Ay," she agreed placidly; "he's no a connoisseur like you, Wullie. Talkin' o' females, hoo's yer aunt keepin'?"

"Rotten—at least she was fine the last time I seen her ugly."

"The decay seems to ha'e been rapid. But, seriously, it's a peety ye canna love yer aunt better——"

"Love her! Oh, help!" the "p" was sounded just in time, and Willie glanced at Macgreegor to see whether he had noticed the stumble.

Macgreegor, however, had forgotten Willie—unless, perhaps to wish him a hundred miles away. Christina was wear-

ing a new white blouse which showed a little bit of her neck, with a bow of her favourite scarlet at the opening.

"D'ye ken what ma aunt done to me the ither day?" Willie proceeded, craving for sympathy. "I was terrible hard up, an' I wrote her a nice letter on a caird wi' a view o' Glesca Cathedral on it, includin' the graveyaird—cost me a penny; an' what dae ye think she sent me back? A bl—oomin' trac'!"

At that moment the kettle boiled, and Christina, exclaiming "Oh, mercy!" sprang to the hearth. Over her shoulder she said in a voice that wavered slightly:

"That was hard cheese, Wullie, but ye maun send her a cheerier-like caird next time. I'll stand ye an optimistic specimen afore ye leave the shop."

"Thenk ye! A—of course we'll ha'e to draw the line at picturs o' folk dookin' in the sad sea waves or canoodlin' on the shore——"

Christina, teapot in one hand, kettle in the other, burst out laughing.

"Mind ye dinna burn yersel'!" cried Macgreegor, starting into life.

"Haud the kettle, Mac," said she. "It's no fair o' Wullie to be sae funny."

"I wasna funny!" Willie protested.

"It's yer notion o' the optimistic that tickled me," she said. "Pour, Mac; I'm steady noo. But ye're quite richt, Wullie. We canna be ower discreet when cash is involved. I'll get some high-class cairds for ye to inspect till the tea's infused."

Macgreegor would dearly have liked to follow her into the shop.

"She's a clinker," observed Willie under his breath.

"Eh?"

"Naething."

Which was all the conversation during the absence of the hostess.

She returned with a tray. Willie was tempted by a card with the "V.C." em-

blazoned on it, but feared it would look "swanky" on his part. Though hampered by the adverse criticisms of Macgreegor, who naturally wanted to hold Christina's hand under cover of the table as long as possible, he succeeded at last in choosing one entitled "The Soldier's Return," depicting a bronzed youth running to embrace an old lady awaiting him in a cottage porch.

"If that doesna touch the spot," said Christina, "I'm a duchess."

They sat down to tea.

Much to Willie's relief, Christina apparently forgot all about a blessing. Anxious to please, he expressed admiration at the abundance of good things.

"I like to see a table groanin'," said the hospitable hostess.

"There'll be mair nor the table groanin' afore long," observed Macgreegor.

They all laughed like happy people, especially Willie, until with a start he remembered the cream cookies and his

omission to bring an extra hanky. All the same, he proceeded to enjoy himself pretty heartily, and did the agreeable to the best of his ability, furnishing sundry anecdotes of camp life which were as new to Macgreegor as they propably were to himself. At last—

"Try a cream cookie," said Christina.

But he could not face it. "Cream," he said mournfully, "doesna agree wi' me. The last time I had cream—ma aunt had got it in for her cat that had the staggers —I lay in agony for three days an' three nichts an' several 'oors into the bargain. Ma aunt feared I was guan to croak ma last."

Macgreegor made a choking sound, while Christina gravely hoped that the cat had also recovered, and passed the macaroons.

"Thenk ye," said Willie, and readily resumed operations. But he was not a little disgusted to note presently that Christina and Macgreegor enjoyed their

cream cookies without the slightest mishap.

His geniality was not fully restored until, at the end of the meal, Christina laid a box of superior cigarettes between her two guests.

"May I drap deid in five meenutes," he declared, "if ever I was treated like this afore! Macgreegor, ye're a lucky blighter!"

"Oh, whisht!" said Christina smiling.

"Ye should get a girl, Wullie," Macgreegor remarked with the air of an old married man.

"I ha'ena your luck, ma lad. If I was trustin' a girl, I'll bet ye a bob she wud turn oot to be yin o' the sort that pinches a chap's wages afore they're warmed in his pooch, an' objec's to him smokin' a fag, an' tak's the huff if he calls her fig-face."

"I'm afraid ye're a pessimist," Christina said. "I used to dae a bit in that line masel'. Ma favourite motto was: 'Cheer

up—ye'll soon be deid!' But I got past that, an' so will you."

With a sardonic smile Willie shook his head and took another cigarette; and just then Christina had to go to attend to a customer.

Willie turned to his friend. "Thon was a dirty trick aboot the cookies. I've a guid mind to bide here as lang as you."

"I didna think ye wud hae been feart for a cookie, Wullie. Of course, I'll never tell her."

"Weel, I accep' yer apology. Can ye len' us thruppence? I want to purchase some War Loan. . . . By Jings, ye're no a bad sort, Macgreegor. . . . Hoo dae ye think I behaved masel'?"

"No that bad."

"Weel, I want ye to tell her I ha'ena enjoyed masel' sae much since ma Uncle Peter's funeral, ten year back."

"Tell her yersel'."

Willie pocketed a few of the superior cigarettes, and rose. "It's sax-thirty," he

said. "Her an' you'll be nane the waur o' hauf an' 'oor in private. See? So long! She's a clinker!"

And before Macgreegor realized it, Willie had bolted through the shop and into the street.

Christina returned, her eyes wide. "What gaed wrang wi' him, Mac?"

"Come here an' I'll tell ye."

XIII

MISS TOD RETURNS

"IT was awfu' dacent o' Wullie to clear oot," Macgreegor remarked happily, as he moved his chair close to the one on which Christina had just seated herself.

Christina's chin went up. "It wud ha'e been dacenter o' him to ha'e waited till the time he was invited to wait."

"But he meant weel. I'm sure he didna want to gang, but he fancied it wud be nice to let you an' me ha'e a—a . . ."

"I beg yer pardon?"

"Ach, ye ken what I mean. He fancied we wud enjoy a wee whiley jist by oorsel's."

"Speak for yersel'! I'm thinkin' it was exceedingly rude o' him to slope wi'oot tellin' me he had enjoyed his tea."

"He asked me to tell ye that he hadna

enjoyed hissel' sae weel since his uncle's funeral, ten year back."

Christina gave a little sniff. "That's a nice sort o' compliment. Funeral, indeed!"

"Christina! what's vexin' ye?"

"Wha said I was vexed?"

"I've seen ye lookin happier."

"Are ye a judge o' happiness?"

"I ken when I'm no happy—an' that's the noo. But I warn ye, I'm no gaun to stick it!"

"What's made ye unhappy?" she coldly inquired.

"You!"

"Dear me!"—ironically.

"Ay, jist dear you!" And with these words he caught her round the shoulders and kissed her.

Breathless and rather ruffled she exclaimed, "If ye dae that again, I'll——"

He did it again.

"Ye're gettin' terrible forward," she said, half angry, half amused.

"High time!"

She regarded him with amazement.

Suddenly he said: "Ye're as much mines as I'm yours. Deny it, if ye can."

For perhaps the first time in her life Christina temporized. "Can ye sweer ye didna arrange wi' Wullie to leave early?"

"Eh?"

The note of innocence satisfied her.

"Weel," she said graciously, "I forgive ye."

"What for?"

"Takin' liberties."

Her lips wavered to a smile and he could not refrain from kissing them once more.

"Here, half time!" she cried, and burst out laughing.

"This is the best yet," he said jubilantly. "Three goals in twa meenutes! In future I'll kiss ye as often as I like."

"We'll see aboot that. . . . The sojerin' has changed ye a lot," she added thoughtfully.

"D'ye no like the improvement?"

"I'll tell ye when I observe it. Noo sit still an' behave yersel', an' tell me the latest camp rumours."

Just then the bell over the door in the shop went off.

"Oh, dash yer customers!" said Macgreegor.

Christina was moving from the room when——

"Are ye there, dearie?" called a familiar female voice.

"Holy Moses!" she whispered. "It's Miss Tod, hame three days afore her time."

"Oh, criffens!" gasped Macgreegor. "What'll I dae?"

"Ye can either hide in the coal bunker, or bide where ye are—like a sojer. She'll no devour ye."

Christina then ran out to receive her employer, which she did without embarrassment.

"What a peety ye're ower late for ma

wee tea-pairty. An' hoo are ye?" Macgreegor heard her saying.

"Aw, I was sweirt to disturb ye wi' yer frien's, lassie," replied Miss Tod, who had been advised by postcard of Christina's doings, "but I *couldna* bide in thon place anither nicht."

"Dear, dear!" the girl said sympathizingly. "Did ye no get on wi' yer auld frien', or did the poultry attack ye? Come ben, come ben. There's jist Macgreegor left, an' he hasna consumed absolutely everything. I'll get ye a cup o' fresh tea in a jiffy."

Smiling faintly but kindly, Miss Tod greeted Macgreegor, apologized for disturbing him, and subsided into her old chair.

"Oh, I'm thankfu' to be hame," she sighed while Christina flew to her hospitable duties. "Ye've got the room awfu' nice, dearie."

"Does the smell o' the ceegarettes annoy ye?" inquired Macgreegor, now

more at ease, though still a little ashamed of his recent panic.

"Na, na; it's jist deleecious," she protested, "efter the smell o' the country."

"Did ye no like the country, Miss Tod?"

"Maybe I could ha'e endured it till the week was up, if it hadna been for ma auld frien'. Ye see, the puir body couldna speak or think o' onything excep' airyplanes fleein' through the air an' drappin' bombs on her dwellin' hoose an' her hen-hoose, no forgettin' her pig-hoose. Mornin', noon an' nicht, she kep' speirin' at me if I was prepared to meet ma Maker, maybe wantin' a leg. Oh, I was rale vexed for her, I tell ye, but when she took the mattress off my bed to protect her sewin' machine frae bombs, I says to masel': 'If I've got to dee, I wud like to dae it as comfortable as I can, an' I'm sure ma Maker'll no objec' to that . . .' an' so, at last, I just tied up ma things in the broon paper, an' said

I had enjoyed masel' fine, but was anxious aboot the shop—a terrible falsehood, dearie!—an' gaed to catch the sax o'clock train, an' catched the yin afore it. . . . An' here I am. I wud ha'e let ye enjoy yer pairty in peace, but what wi' the forebodin's o' ma auld frien' an' the scent o' the hens an' pigs, I could thole nae longer."

"In short," Christina brightly remarked, "ye was fed up. Weel, weel, ye'll sune forget aboot yer troubles in the joys o' pursuin' pastries. We'll fetch the table close to ye so as ye can fall to wi'oot unduly streechin' yer neck. Mac, get busy! Toast this cookie."

"She's a great manager," Miss Tod said, smiling to Macgreegor. "But she'll mak' ye a rael guid wife when ye come back frae the wars——"

"Oh, whisht, Miss Tod!" cried Christina. "Ye'll cause him to blush." Which was rather a mean way of diverting attention from her own complexion.

However, at that moment the bell rang, and exclaiming, "Anither boom in trade!" she darted into the shop.

The customer seemed to be in a great hurry, for almost immediately she reappeared in the sitting-room. She was smiling and carried a small package in her hand.

"Guess wha it was," said she.

"The meenister," replied Miss Tod, who for some mysterious reason always guessed the reverend gentleman, who happened to be a customer.

"On the contrary," said Christina.

"Wullie Thomson," said Macgreegor, suddenly remembering the borrowed threepence.

"Up dux! Ye deserve a sweetie." She presented the bag, open. "What sort are they?"

He laughed and answered—"War Loan Lozengers."

XIV

AUNT PURDIE INTERVENES

THE battalion was not an hour returned from the longest, hottest, dustiest and most exhausting route march yet experienced. Macgreegor was stretched on his bed, a newspaper over his face, when an orderly shook him and shoved a visiting card into his hand.

"She's waitin' ootside," he said and, with a laugh, departed.

Macgreegor rubbed his eyes and read:

> MRS. ROBERT PURDIE.
>
> *13, King's Mansions, W.* *3rd Wednesday.*

"Oh, criffens!" he groaned. "Ma aunt!" And proceeded with more haste than alacrity to tidy himself, while won-

dering what on earth she had come for.

Willie, scenting profit in a rich relation, though not his own, proffered his company, which was rather curtly refused. Nevertheless, he followed his friend.

Macgreegor joined his aunt in the blazing sunshine. Her greeting was kindly if patronizing.

"Sorry to keep ye waitin', Aunt Purdie," he said respectfully. "If I had kent ye was comin'——"

"I understood a good soldier was always prepared for any emergency——"

"Excep' when he's off duty, mistress." This from Willie, who had taken up his position a little way behind Macgreegor. an ingratiating grin on his countenance.

Aunt Purdie drew up her tall, gaunt, richly-clad figure and examined Private Thomson through eye-glasses on a long tortoise-shell handle.

"Macgreegor, who is this gentleman?"

"It's jist Wullie Thomson," said Macgreegor, annoyed but reluctant to hurt

his friend's feelings. "D'ye no mind him?"

"I have a very exclusive memory for faces. . . . Dear me, he is going away!"

It was so. Either the glasses, or being called a gentleman, or both, had been too much even for Willie.

"Is the colonel in the vicinity?" Aunt Purdie demanded, recalling Macgreegor's wondering gaze from the retreating figure.

"I couldna say. He's liker to be in a cauld bath."

"You have, of course, informed him who your uncle is?"

"Me an' the colonel ha'ena done much hob-nobbin' as yet," Macgreegor said, smiling.

"His mother used to obtain her groceries from your uncle. If you could have presented the colonel to me—well, never mind. I presume the major is on the *quee vive.*"

"He'll be ha'ein' a wash an' brush up, I wud say."

"But why are you not being drilled or digging up trenches or firing guns——"

"We're a' deid men this afternune. Had a big rout mairch the day."

"Oh, indeed! Well, when does the band play?"

"The baun's burstit wi' the rout mairch. It couldna blaw the ash off a ceegarette. I'm rael sorry——"

"I would like to inspect the apartments you live in. Pray conduct me——"

"Some o' the chaps is cleanin' theirsel's. If ye like, I'll tell them to hurry up or get ablow the blankets."

"Certainly not!" said Mrs. Purdie with decision. "Is there no tea-room adjacent?"

"Jist the canteen. I doobt I couldna tak' ye inside, but I could fetch ye oot a drink—something T.T., I suppose?"

She waved the offer away. "Is there nothing to be perceived or observed in this camp?" she inquired with some impatience.

Her nephew scratched his head. "Weel," he said at last, "there's the view frae this end, an' there's the view frae the ither end. I'm sorry, ye've come when there's naething daein'."

"So am I. However, it is not the time to indulge in discriminations. Your uncle thought it was better for me to come than to write a letter."

"Is onything wrang wi' ma uncle?" Macgreegor asked anxiously.

"Barring an invidious bunion, he is in his usual health. But we are going to Aberdeen to-morrow, for a fortnight, and we have invited your intended to come with us. She——"

"Christina! But she canna gang awa' to Aberdeen when——" He stopped short, at a loss. He had an appointment with Christina for the following evening. Surely——

"I arranged with Miss Tod this morning. Christina will be writing to you, I presume."

"She—she's gaun wi' ye?"

"Certainly—D.V., of course."

"For a—a fortnight?"

"The change will be good for her. You must not be selfish. Your uncle was afraid you might be put out: that is why I came to explain. But apart from the beneficial change, Christina, as I observed to your uncle, ought to see the world while she is young."

Macgreegor answered nothing. Possibly he did not catch her latter remarks. Christina going away for a fortnight, and he might be ordered abroad at any moment!

"Come," said his aunt, kindly enough, "don't be huffy."

Mercifully, just then an officer passed. In the action of saluting Macgreegor regained self-control.

"I hope ye get guid weather at Aberdeen," he managed to say, and his aunt admired him even more than at the hour of his enlistment.

"Yer uncle an' me jist wishes ye was free to jine us," she said with unwonted warmth and homeliness of accent. Her hand went to the fastening of her purse and hesitated. No! Something told her this was not the moment for a gift, however generous.

"Well, I must be going," she remarked, stiffening again. "Kindly conduct me to the exit. I thought there would have been more to inspire the mind in this place. . . . Good-bye. We will take good care of Christina."

* * * * *

Never in his life had Macgreegor been so deeply hurt and angered—not even in the old days by Aunt Purdie, who was not now the object of his resentment.

Willie, who always tried to make the best of things, insults not excepted, approached presently with a hopeful appeal for a loan.

"Gang to blazes!" was the response.

Willie could scarce believe his ears.

"Macgreegor! did she no cough up onything?"

Macgreegor walked on.

"An' she fancies hersel' for a——swell!" exclaimed Willie viciously.

"Anither word an' I'll knock the face off ye!"

It was Willie's turn to feel resentment.

In the evening came a note from Christina, hurriedly written. She was terribly busy getting ready for the morning train. It was most kind of Mrs. Purdie. Her own uncle must have let drop to Mr. Purdie that a summer outing this year was not possible, and Mr. Purdie must have told Mrs. Purdie. . . . Of course, she, Christina, would never have dreamed of going away otherwise. But the time would soon pass, Mac, and she intended to enjoy it thoroughly. . . .

If only she had left out that last sentence! But what true lover has not been stabbed by something very like it in his time?

XV

THE FAT GIRL AGAIN

MACGREEGOR dropped his reply to Christina's unsatisfactory note into the pillar-box and, half wishing he had destroyed it instead, rejoined the faithful Willie Thomson. He still looked so gloomy that Willie once more demanded to be told what the—— was "up" with him. Receiving no response, Willie remarked:

"If ye tak' a face like that to yer girl, she'll be wantin' to play a tune on it."

Macgreegor held his peace. They had just arrived in Glasgow, but without a trace of the usual eagerness on his part.

"I believe," said Willie, with an inspiration, "her an' you ha'e cast oot."

"Clay up! She's awa' her holidays."

"Save us! Awa' her holidays!" cried

Willie, uttering, unawares, his friend's bitterest thought—"an' we may get oor mairchin' orders ony meenute! Weel, weel, preserve me frae the female sect! I suppose ye'll be for gi'ein' yer ain folk a treat for a change."

"They're a' at Rothesay, at Granpaw Purdie's," Macgreegor returned shortly, now half glad that he had let the letter go.

It was not a harsh letter, yet neither was it a humble one. In effect, it informed Christina that she was welcome to disport herself even though the writer lay dead in a trench. While intended to be freezing, it had been written in considerable heat, physical and mental.

"Then what are ye gaun to dae the nicht?" Willie pursued, his mind simmering with curiosity. Macgreegor had been very queer since his aunt's visit of the previous afternoon, and the arrival of a letter, eagerly grabbed, had by no means mitigated the queerness. Willie was convinced that something had gone wrong

between Macgreegor and Christina. He would not be sorry to see the engagement broken. Macgreegor would have more time and cash to spend on his friends. On the other hand, Christina was undoubtedly a "clinker" in her way, and Willie could do with more hospitality like hers. Well, there was no saying what might happen if she were free and Macgreegor attached to another girl. . . .

"What are ye gaun to dae the nicht, Macgreegor?" he repeated, rousing himself as well as his friend.

"Dear knows," came the dreary answer. "I think I'll awa' back to the camp." Yet if he did not greatly desire Willie's company, he desired his own less.

"Cheer up for ony favour," said Willie. "If I could afford it, I wud stan' ye a feed."

The hint was not taken, and they strolled on, aimlessly so far as Macgreegor was concerned.

About six o'clock, and while they were

passing a large drapery warehouse, Willie gave his friend a violent nudge and hoarsely whispered:

"Gor! See thon!"

"What?"

"Thon girl!"—pointing to a damsel in a dark skirt and white blouse, who had just emerged from the warehouse.

"What aboot her?" said Macgreegor impatiently.

"It's her—the fat yin—the girl I burst the twa bob on!"

"She's no that fat," Macgreegor remarked without interest. Then suddenly —"Here! What are ye efter!"

"Her! She's fat when ye're close to her. Come on! I'll introjuice ye."

"Thenk ye! I'm no takin' ony."

"Jist for fun. I want to see her face when she sees me again."

"Weel, I'll no prevent ye. So long."

At that moment the girl was held up at a busy crossing.

"Hullo, Maggie!" said Willie pertly.

"I'm off," said Macgreegor—but his arm was gripped.

The girl turned. "Hullo," she said coolly; "still livin'?" Catching sight of Macgreegor, she giggled. It was not an unpleasing giggle. Lean girls cannot produce it.

"This is Private Macgreegor Robi'son," said Willie, unabashed.

She smiled and held out her hand. After a moment she said to Willie: "Are ye no gaun to tell him ma name, stupid?"

"I forget it, except the Maggie."

"Aweel," she said good-humouredly, "Private Robi'son'll jist ha'e to content hissel' wi' that, though it's a terrible common name." She did the giggle again.

The chance of crossing came, and they all moved over; on the crowded pavement it was impossible to proceed three abreast.

"Never mind me," said Willie humourously.

"Wha's mindin' you?" she retorted.

"Gettin' hame?" said Macgreegor with

an effort at politeness, while fuming inwardly.

"Jist that. Awfu' warm weather, is't no? It was fair meltin' in the warehoose the day. I'm fair dished up." She heaved a sigh, which was no more unpleasing than her giggle. "It's killin' weather for you sojer lads," she added kindly.

Macgreegor experienced a wavelet of sympathy. "Wud ye like a slider?" he asked abruptly.

"Ye're awfu' kind. I could dae wi' it fine."

Presently the three were seated in an ice-cream saloon. The conversation was supplied mainly by the girl and Willie, and took the form of a wordy sparring match. Every time she scored a point the girl glanced at Macgreegor. He became mildly amused by her repartee, and at last took a cautious look at her.

She was certainly stout, but not with a clumsy stoutness; in fact, her figure was

rather attractive. She had dark brown hair, long lashed, soft, dark eyes, a provocative, mobile mouth, and a nice pinky-tan colouring. At the same time, she was too frankly forward and consistently impudent for Macgreegor's taste; and he noticed that her hands were not pretty like Christina's.

She caught his eye, and he smiled back, but absently. He was wondering what Christina was doing and how she would take his letter in the morning. . . . He consulted his watch. A long, empty evening lay before him. How on earth was he to fill it? He wanted distraction, and already his companions' chaff was getting tiresome.

On the spur of the moment—"What aboot a pictur hoose?" he said.

"That's the cheese!" cried Willie.

But Maggie shook her head and sighed, and explained that her mother was expecting her home for tea, and sighed again.

"Ha'e yer tea wi' us," said the hospitable Macgreegor.

She glanced at him under lowered lashes, her colour rising. "My! ye're awfu' kind," she said softly. "I wish to goodness I could."

"Scoot hame an' tell yer mither, an' we'll wait for ye here," said stage-manager William.

"I wudna trust you . . . but I think I could trust *him*."

"Oh, we'll wait sure enough," Macgreegor said indifferently.

"I'll risk it!" she cried, and straightway departed.

Willie grinned at his friend. "What dae ye think o' fat Maggie?" he said.

"Naething," answered Mac, and refused to be drawn into further conversation.

Within half an hour she was back, flushed and bright of eye. She had on a pink print, crisp and fresh, a flowery hat,

gloves carefully mended, neat shoes and transparent stockings.

"By Jings, ye're dressed to kill at a thoosan' yairds!" Willie observed.

Ignoring him, she looked anxiously for the other's approval.

"D'ye like hot pies?" he inquired, rising and stretching himself.

An hour later, in the picture house a heartrending, soul thrilling melodrama was at its last gasp. The long-suffering heroine was in the arms of the long misjudged, misfortune-ridden, but ever faithful hero.

"Oh, lovely!" murmured Maggie.

Macgreegor said nothing, but his eyes were moist. He may, or may not, have been conscious of a plump, warm, thinly-clad shoulder close against his arm.

Hero and heroine vanished. The lights went up. Macgreegor blew his nose, then looked past the fat girl to make a scoffing remark to Willie.

But Willie's seat was vacant.

* * * * *

Maggie laid her ungloved hand on the adjoining seat. "It's warm," she informed Macgreegor. "He canna be lang awa'."

"Did he no say he was comin' back?" Macgreegor asked rather irritably.

"He never said a word to me. I didna notice him gang: I was that ta'en up wi' the picturs. But never heed," she went on cheerfully; "it's a guid riddance o' bad rubbish. I wonder what's next on the prog——"

"But this'll no dae! He—he's your frien'."

"Him! Excuse me for seemin' to smile! I can tell ye I was surprised to see a dacent-like chap like you sae chummy wi' sic a bad character as him."

"Aw, Wullie Thomson's no near as bad as his character. A' the same, he had nae business to slope wi'oot lettin' us ken. But he'll likely be comin' back. We'll wait for five meenutes an' see."

Maggie drew herself up. "I prefer no to wait where I'm no welcome," she said in a deeply offended tone, and made to rise.

He caught her plump arm. "Wha said ye wasna welcome? Eat yer sweeties an' dinna talk nonsense. If ye want to see the rest o' the picturs, I'm on. I've nae-thing else to dae the nicht."

After a slight pause. "Dae ye want me to bide—Macgreegor?"

"I'm asking ye."

She sighed. "Ye're a queer lad. What's yer age?"

"Nineteen."

"Same as mines!" She was twenty-two. "When's yer birthday?"

"Third o' Mairch."

"Same again!" she had been born on the 14th of December. "My! that's a strange dooble coincidence! We ought to be guid frien's, you an' me."

"What for no?" said Macgreegor carelessly.

Once more the house was darkened. A comic film was unrolled. Now and then Macgreegor chuckled with moderate heartiness.

"Enjoyin' yersel'?" she said in a chocolate whisper, close to his ear.

"So, so."

"Ye're like me. I prefer the serious picturs. Real life an' true love for me! Ha'e a sweetie? Oh, ye're smokin'. As I was sayin', ye're a queer lad, Macgreegor." She leaned against his arm. "What made ye stan' me a slider, an' a champion tea, an' they nice sweeties, an' a best sate in a pictur hoose—when ye wasna extra keen on ma comp'ny?"

"Dear knows."

She drew away from him so smartly that he turned his face towards her. "Oh, crool!" she murmured, and put her handherchief to her eyes.

"Dinna dae that!" he whispered, alarmed. "What's up?"

"Ye—ye insulted me."

"Insulted ye! Guid kens I didna mean it. What did I say?"

"Oh, dear, Ill never get over it."

"Havers! I'll apologize if ye tell me what I said. Dinna greet, for ony favour. Ye'll ha'e the folk lookin' at us. Listen, Mary—that's yer name, is't no?"

"It's Maggie, ye impiddent thing!"

"Weel, Maggie, I apologize for whatever I said, whether I said it or no. I'm no ma usual the nicht, so ye maun try for to excuse me. I certainly never meant for to hurt yer feelin's."

She dropped the handkerchief. "Ha'e ye got a sair heid?"

"Ay—something like that. So let me doon easy."

She slid her hand under his which was overhanging the division between the seats. "I'm sorry I was silly, but I'm that tender-hearted, I was feart ye was takin' yer fun off me. I'm awfu' vexed ye've got a sair heid. I suppose it's the

heat. Ony objection to me callin' ye Macgreegor?"

"That's a' richt," he repued kindly but uneasily.

Her fingers were round his, and seemingly she forgot they were there, even when the lights went up. And he hadn't the courage—shall we say?—to withdraw them.

The succeeding film depicted a throbbing love story.

"This is mair in oor line," she remarked confidentially.

Every time the sentiment rose to a high temperature, which was pretty often, Macgreegor felt a warm pressure on his fingers. He had never before had a similar experience, not even in the half-forgotten days of Jessie Mary; for Jessie Mary had not become the pursuer until he had betrayed anxiety to escape from her toils. And he had been only seventeen then.

The warm pressure made him uncom-

fortable, but not physically so—and, apart from conscience, perhaps not altogether spiritually so. For, after all, it's a very sore young manly heart, indeed, that can refuse the solace, or distraction, offered in the close proximity of young womanhood of the Maggie sort and shape. In other words, Macgreegor may have been conscientiously afraid, but he had no disposition to run away.

About nine-thirty they came out. While he looked a little dazed and defiant, she appeared entirely happy and self-possessed, with her hand in his arm as though he had belonged to her for quite a long time. But at the gorgeous portals she stopped short with a cry of dismay. It was raining heavily.

"I've nae umburella," she said, piteously regarding her fine feathers. "Ma things 'll be ruined."

"I'll get ye a cab," he said after some hesitation induced less by consideration of

the expense than by the sheer novelty of the proceeding. Ere she could respond he was gone. Not without trouble and a thorough drenching he discovered a decrepit four-wheeler.

Maggie had never been so proud as at the moment when he handed her in, awkwardly enough, but with a certain shy respectfulness which she found entirely delicious.

He gave the man the address, learned the fare, then came back to the door and handed the girl the necessary money.

"Na!" she cried in a panic, "I'll no gang unless ye come wi' me. I—I wud be feart to sit ma lane in the cab. Come, lad; ye've plenty time."

He had no more than enough, but he got in after telling the man to drive as quickly as possible.

"Sit here," she said, patting the cushion at her side.

He obeyed, and then followed a long

pause while the cab rattled over the granite. She unpinned and removed her hat and leaned against him heavily yet softly.

"Ye're no sayin' a great deal," she remarked at last. "What girl are ye thinkin' aboot?"

"Ach, I'm dashed wearit," he said. "I didna sleep a wink last nicht."

"Puir sojer laddie!" Her smooth, hot cheek touched his. "Pit yer heid on ma shouther. . . . I like ye because ye're shy . . . but ye needna be ower shy."

Suddenly he gave a foolish laugh and thrust his arm round her waist. She heaved a sigh of content.

* * * * *

By making all haste Macgreegor managed to get back to the camp in advance of Willie. He was in bed, his eyes hard shut, when his friend appeared in the billet.

Willie, who was unusually flushed, bent over him and, sniggering, asked questions.

Getting no response, he retired grinning and winking at no one in particular.

Macgreegor did not sleep well. If you could have listened to his secret thoughts you would have heard, among other dreary things—

"But I didna kiss her; I didna kiss her."

XVI

CONSCIENCE AND A COCOA-NUT

WITH one thing and another Christina, during her first evening in Aberdeen, had no opportunity of sending her betrothed more than a postcard announcing her safe arrival; but she went to bed with every intention of sending him on the morrow the longest and sweetest letter she had ever written. The receipt of Macgreegor's letter, with all its implied reproaches, however, not only hurt her feelings, but set her pride up in arms. "He had nae business to write as if I was a selfish thing; as if I had nae right to decide for masel'!" As a matter of fact, her sole reason for accepting Mrs. Purdie's invitation had been a fear of offending Macgreegor's important relatives by a refusal. Heaven knew

she had not wanted to put 150 miles between her lad and herself at such a time.

Still, as Macgreegor might have known by now, it was always a mistake to try to hustle Christina in any way. Her reply condescended neither to explanations nor defence. Written in her superior, and rather high-flown English, which she was well aware he detested, it practically ignored his epistle and took the form of an essay on the delights of travel, the charm of residence in the Northern City, the kindliness and generosity of host and hostess. She was not without compunction, especially when Uncle Purdie expressed the hope that she was sending the lad something to "keep up his pecker," but she let the letter go, telling herself that it would be "good for him."

The postcard was received by Macgreegor after an uneasy night and a shameful awakening. The meagre message made him more miserable than angry. In the circumstances it was, he

felt bound to admit, as much as he deserved. Mercifully, Willie had such a "rotten head" that he was unable to plague his unhappy friend, and the day turned out to be a particularly busy one for the battalion. Next morning brought the letter. Macgreegor was furious, until Conscience asked him what he had to complain about.

Willie, his mischievous self again, got in a nasty one by inquiring how much he had paid for the cab the night before last.

"Ye dirty spy!" cried Macgreegor. "What for did ye hook it in the pictur' hoose an' leave her wi' me? She was *your* affair."

"I never asked her to spend the evenin'." Willie retorted, truthfully enough. "Twa's comp'ny."

Macgreegor felt his face growing hot. With an effort he said coldly: "If ye had stopped wi' us ye wudna ha'e been back at the beer an' broke yer pledge."

"Wha tell't ye I was at the beer?"

"Yer breath, ye eediot!"

"Ho! so ye was pretendin' ye was sleepin' when I spoke to ye! Cooard to smell a man's breath wi' yer eyes shut!"

Macgreegor turned wearily away. "It's nae odds to me what ye drink," he said.

"Ye should think shame to say a thing like that to a chap that hasna tasted but wance for near a year—at least, for several months," said Willie, following. "But I'll forgive ye like a Christian. . . . For ony sake len' us a saxpence. I ha'ena had a fag since yesterday. I'll no split on ye." He winked and nudged Macgreegor. "Maggie's a whale for the cuddlin'—eh?"

It was too much. Macgreegor turned and struck, and Willie went down. Then Macgreegor, feeling sick of himself and the whole world, assisted the fallen one to his feet, shoved a shilling into his hand, and departed hastily.

He wrote a long, pleading letter to

Christina and posted it—in the cook's fire. Next day he tried again, avoiding personal matters. The result was a long rambling dissertation on musketry and the effect of the wind, etcetera, on one's shots, all of which, with his best love, he forwarded to Aberdeen. In previous letters he had scarcely ever referred to his training, and then with the utmost brevity.

The letter, quite apart from its technicalities, puzzled Christina; and to puzzle Christina was to annoy her. To her mind it seemed to have been written for the sake of covering so much paper. Of course she wanted Macgreegor to be interested in his work, but not to the exclusion of herself. She allowed the thing to rankle for three days. Then, as there was no further word from him, she became a little alarmed. But it was not in her to write all she felt, and so she sought to break the tension with something in the way of a joke.

Thus it came about that on the fifth

morning, Macgreegor received a postcard depicting a light-house on a rocky coast and bearing a few written words, also an oddly shaped parcel. The written words were:—

"Delighted to hear you are doing so well at the shooting. Sending prize by same post."

This was better!—more like Christina herself. All was not lost! Eagerly he tore off the numerous wrappings and disclosed a—cocoa-nut! In his present state of mind he would have preferred an infernal machine. A cocoa-nut! She was just laughing at him! He was about to conceal the nut when Willie appeared.

"My! ye're the lucky blighter, Macgreegor! Frae yer uncle, I suppose. I'll help ye to crack it. I'll toss ye for the milk —if there's ony."

"I'm no gaun to crack it the noo, Wullie," Macgreegor said, restraining himself.

"At nicht—eh?"

"I'll see."

By evening, however, Willie was not thinking of cocoa-nuts or, indeed, of anything in the nature of eatables. His first experience in firing a rifle had taken place that afternoon and had left him with an aching jaw and a highly swollen face. On the morrow he was not much better.

"I'll no be able to use ma late pass the nicht," he said bitterly.

"I'm no carin' whether I use mines or no," Macgreegor remarked from the depths of his dejection.

Willie gave him a grostesque wink, and observed: "I believe ye're feart to gang into Glesca noo. Oh, they weemen!"

"If ye hadna a face for pies already, I wud gi'e ye yin!"

"Ah, but ye daurna strike a man that's been wounded in his country's service. Aw, gor, I wisht I had never enlisted! What country's worth a mug like this? . . . Which girl are ye maist feart for, Macgreegor?"

Macgreegor fled from the tormentor.

He had not intended to use his late pass, but Willie's taunt had altered everything. Afraid? He would soon show Willie! Also he would show Maggie! Likewise he would show—Well, Christina had no business to behave as if she were the only girl in the world, as if he were a fool. He had a right to enjoy himself, too. He had suffered enough, and the cocoa-nut was the limit! . . .

"Are ye for Glesca?" Willie persisted when Macgreegor was giving himself a "tosh up" in the billet.

"Ay, am I!" he snapped at last.

"Hurray for the hero! Weel, gi'e Maggie a chased salute on the squeaker frae me, an' tell her no to greet for me, because I'm no worthy o' her pure unselfish love, etceetera. I doobt the weather's gaun to be ower fine for cabs the nicht, but dinna despair; it's gettin' dark fairly early noo. Enjoy yersel' while ye're young."

"That's enough," said Macgreegor.

"Ye needna think ye're the only chap that kens a thing or twa!" And he left William gaping as widely as his painful jaw would permit.

On the way to town he decided to leave the whole affair to chance; that is to say, he would not arrive at the warehouse where the fat girl was employed until *after* the usual closing hour of six. If she had gone, no matter; if she was still there, well, he couldn't help it.

He arrived at 6.3, and she was there—in her fine feathers, too. She could not have expected him, he knew, but evidently she had hoped. He felt flattered and soothed, being unaware that she had had another swain in reserve in case he should fail her.

"Fancy meetin' you!" she exclaimed, with a start of surprise. "Where's the bad character?"

"Gumbile," answered Macgreegor, who would not for worlds have betrayed his friend's lack of skill with the rifle.

"Long may it bile!" she remarked unfeelingly. "Wha are ye chasin' the nicht, Macgreegor?"

"You!" he replied more boldly than brightly.

"My! ye're gettin' quite forward-like," she said, with that pleasant giggle of hers.

"High time!" said he, recklessly.

After tea they went west and sat in the park. It was a lovely, hazy evening.

"Wud ye rayther be in a pictur' hoose, Maggie?"

"What's a pictur' hoose to be compared wi' this? If Heaven's like this, I'm prepared to dee." With three rose-flavoured jujubes in her mouth, she sighed and nestled against him.

In silence his arm went round her waist.

* * * * *

While waiting for the car back to camp he wrote on a picture postcard—"Cocoanut received with thanks. I wish I was dead,"—and dropped it into the pillar box.

About the same hour, in the billet, Willie was disposing of the cocoa-nut by raffle, tickets one penny each.

"A queer-like present to get frae yer aunt," said some one.

"Ay; but she's a queer-like aunt," said Willie, pocketing the useful sum of tenpence.

XVII

"FONDEST LOVE FROM MAGGIE"

MORNING brought no letter from Christina, but at breakfast time Macgreegor received the astounding intimation that he was granted three days' leave, the same to commence with the very next hour.

"What's the guid o' leave wi' a jaw like this?" wailed the lop-sided William who, with several other members of the billet, had been included in the dispensation.

"I'll tell ye what it means, onyway," said Lance-corporal Jake; "it means that we'll be gettin' a move on afore we're mony days aulder."

Macgreegor did not enter into any of the discussions which followed. Having hurriedly made himself as smart as pos-

sible, he took car for Glasgow, and there caught the ten o'clock train for Aberdeen. He spent the ensuing four hours in wondering—not so much what he should say to Christina as what she would say to him. For himself he was determined to make a clean breast of it; at the same time, he was not going to absolve Christina of all responsibility. He had behaved like a fool, he admitted, but he still had a just grievance. Yet it was with no very stout heart that he alighted in the big station, where everything was strange except the colour of khaki, and found his way to the quiet hotel where his friends had rooms.

And there on the steps was Uncle Purdie sunning himself and smoking a richly-banded cigar—by order of his spouse.

"Preserve us!" exclaimed Uncle Purdie in sheer astonishment at the sight of his nephew. "Preserve us!" he repeated in quite another tone—that of concern. "But I'm rael glad to see ye, lad," he went on somewhat uneasily, "an' yer aunt

'll be unco pleased. Come awa' in, come awa' in! Ye've gotten a bit leave, I preshume. An' ye'll be needin' yer dinner —eh? But we'll sune see to that. 'Mphm! Ay! Jist so! Eh—I suppose ye hadna time to write or wire—but what's the odds? Ye're welcome, Macgreegor, rael welcome."

"Jist got leave this mornin'—three days," Macgreegor explained, not a little relieved to have found his uncle alone to begin with. "So I catched the first train I could."

"Jist that, exactly so," said Mr. Purdie with a heavy sigh that seemed irrelevant. "Weel, ma lad," he resumed hurriedly, "if ye tak' a sate here, I'll awa' up the stair an' get yer aunt. She generally has a bit snooze aboot this time—efter her meal, ye ken—but——"

"Dinna fash her aboot me, Uncle Purdie."

"Oh, but it—it's—necessary to get her doon here. She'll maybe be able to break

—I meant for to say——" Mr. Purdie stopped short and wiped perspiration from his face. "Jist a meenute," he said abruptly, and bolted upstairs.

Macgreegor gazed after the retreating burly figure. Never before had he seen his uncle nervous. Was Aunt Purdie not so well? It was news to hear of her napping in the middle of the day. Then a likelier explanation dawned on Macgreegor, and he smiled to himself. Uncle Purdie had been too shy to mention it, and now he had retired simply to allow of Christina's coming down by herself. So Macgreegor prepared to meet his love.

And while he meditated, his aunt and uncle appeared together.

"Yer aunt'll explain," said Mr. Purdie, looking most unhappy. "I couldna dae it."

"How do you do, Macgreegor?" said Aunt Purdie, shaking hands with stiff kindliness. "I am delighted to perceive

you in Aberdeen. But what a deplorable catastrophe!—what a dire calamity!—what an ironical mishap!——"

"She means——" began Mr. Purdie, noting his nephew's puzzled distress.

"Hush, Robert! Allow me. I must break it gently to the boy. What a cruel fiascio!—what a vexatious disappintment!——"

"Where's Christina?" Macgreegor demanded.

"Courage, boy!" said Aunt Purdie in lofty tones. "Remember you are a sojer—soldier—of the Queen—or rather, King!"

"But——"

"Christina left for Glasgow per the 1.10 p.m. train, one short hour before you arrived."

"Weel, I'm——"

"She decided very suddenly this morning. She did not hand me the letter, or p.c. for my perusual, but I understood her to observe that Miss Tod was not feel-

ing so able and desired her presence. We were real sorry to let her go——"

"Ma impression," Mr. Purdie put in, "is that she was wearyin' for her lad. But for ill-luck this is the maist confounded, dampest——"

"Robert, behave yourself!"

"Weel, it's a fair sickener. But there's nae use talkin' aboot it. Come awa', lad, an' ha'e something to eat. Ye canna keep up yer heart on a toom kyte."

They were very kind to him and pressed him to remain overnight, but he was bent on leaving by the 3.40 express, which is due at Glasgow about 7.30. With good luck, he told himself, he might catch Christina at Miss Tod's. Meanwhile youth and health compelled him to enjoy his dinner, during which Aunt Purdie insisted on refunding the cost of his futile journey.

"Ye're ower guid to me," he said awkwardly.

"Not at all, not at all, Macgreegor. It is quite unmentionable," she returned

with a majestic wave. "Robert, give Macgreegor some of your choice cigars."

In the train he smoked one of them, but finding it a trifle heady, preserved the rest for presentation to his sergeant, whom he greatly admired.

* * * * *

At 5.30 Christina was in Glasgow. Mrs. Purdie had commissioned her to deliver two small parcels—"presents from Aberdeen"—to Macgreegor's sister and little brother, and she decided to fulfill the errand before going home. Perhaps the decision was not unconnected with a hope of obtaining some news of Macgreegor. His postcard had worried her. She felt she had gone too far and wanted to tell him so. She would write to him the moment she got home, and let her heart speak out for once. Pride was in abeyance. She was all tenderness.

At the Robinson's house she received a warm welcome. Mrs. Robinson had almost got over her secret fear of her future

daughter-in-law. Jennie admired her intensely, and wee Jimsie frankly loved her. Aunt Purdie's were not the only gifts she delivered.

"Ye're hame suner nor ye intended," said Mrs. Robinson, during tea, which was partaken of without Mr. Robinson, who was "extra busy" over munitions. "Was Miss Tod wantin' ye?"

"Macgreegor was wantin' her," piped Jimsie. "So was I."

"Whisht, Jimsie," Jeannie murmured, blushing more than Christina.

"We jist got hame frae Rothesay last nicht," said Mrs. Robinson, "so we ha'ena seen the laddie for a while."

"He hasna wrote this week," remarked Jeannie. "But of course *you'll* ha'e heard frae him, Christina"—this with respectful diffidence.

"He's been busy at the shootin'," Christina replied, wishing she had more news to give.

"I wisht I had a gun," observed Jim-

sie. "I wud shoot the wuskers off auld Turpy. Jings, I wud that!"

"Dinna boast," said his mother.

"What wud you shoot, Christina, if you had a gun?"

"I think I wud practise on a cocoa-nut, Jimsie," she said, with a small laugh.

After tea Mrs. Robinson took Christina into the parlour while Jeannie tidied up. Presently the door bell rang, and Jimsie rushed to meet the postman.

"It's for Macgreegor," he announced, returning and handing a parcel to his mother.

"I wonder wha's sendin' the laddie socks," she said, feeling it. "I best open it an' put his name on them. Maybe they're frae Mistress McOstrich." She removed the string and brown paper. "Vera nice socks—a wee thing to the lairge side—but vera nice socks, indeed. But wha——"

"Here's a letter!" cried Jimsie, extracting a half-sheet of white paper from the

crumpled brown, and giving it to his dear Christina.

In bold, untidy writing she read—

"With fondest love from Maggie."

XVIII

PITY THE POOR PARENTS!

"IT'S a peety Macgreegor didna see his intended the nicht," Mr. Robinson observed when his son, after a couple of hours at the parental hearth, had gone to bed, "but we canna help trains bein' late."

Mrs. Robinson felt that it was perhaps just as well the two young people had not met that night, but refrained from saying so. "Hoo dae ye think Macgreegor's lookin', John?" she asked after a pause.

"I didna notice onything wrang wi' him. He hadna a great deal to say for hissel'; but that's naething new. Queer hoo a noisy, steerin' wean like he was, grows into a quiet, douce young man."

"He's maybe no as douce as ye think," said Lizzie under her breath.

"What's that?"

"Naething, John." She sighed heavily.

"What's wrang, wife?"

"I was wishin' we had a niece called Maggie. . . . I suppose it's nae use askin' if ye ever heard o' Macgreegor ha'ein' an acquaintance o' that name."

"Maggie? Weel, it's no what ye would call a unique name. But what——"

"Listen, John. When Christina was here the day, a wee paircel cam' for Macgreegor, an' when I opened it, there was a pair o' socks wi'—wi' fondest love from Maggie."

"Hurray for Maggie!"

"But, John, Christina read the words!"

"Oho!" John guffawed. "She wudna like that—eh?"

"Man, what are ye laughin' at? Ye ken Christina's terrible prood."

"No ony prooder nor Macgreegor is o' her, Lizzie."

"That's no what I meant. Christina wud never put up wi' Macgreegor lookin' at anither lass."

"Weemen was born jealous; but it's guid for them."

"John Robi'son! ha'e ye the face to tell me ye wud approve o' Macgreegor cairryin' on wi' anither lass when he's engaged to Christina?"

"Of course I wudna exac'ly approve o' it." Mr. Robinson scratched his head. "But surely ye're raisin' an awfu' excitement ower a pair o' socks."

"It wasna the socks, ye stupid: it was the fondest love!"

John laughed again, but less boisterously.

"Maggie's no backward, whatever she is. Did ye no speir at Macgreegor aboot her?"

"Oh, man! ha'e ye nae sense? I jist tied up the paircel again an' left it on his bed."

"Weel, that ends it," John said comfortably. "But"—with a wink—"let it be a lesson to ye never to tamper wi' yer son's correspondence. Ye're pretty sure to find mair nor ye expec'."

Mrs. Robinson clasped her hands. "Oh, dear! hoo can ye joke aboot it? What if Christina breaks her engagement."

"What?" he cried, suddenly alarmed. "Break her engagement! Surely ye dinna mean that! Did she say onything? Did she seem offended? Did she——"

"Never a word—but her look was different. But whatever stupid thing the laddie may ha'e done, his heart's set on Christina. It wud break his heart if——"

"This is bad," said John, all dismayed. "I didna think it wud be that serious. But I'll tell ye what I'll dae, Lizzie. "I'll gang the morn and see Christina an' tell her——"

"What'll ye tell her?"

"Dear knows! What wud ye say yersel'?"

"Neither you nor me can say onything. Macgreegor'll ha'e to explain—if he can."

Mr. Robinson groaned, then brightened. "I once had a cousin called Maggie," he

said; "unfortunately she's been deid for fifteen year. Still——"

"It's time ye was in yer bed, John. Ye canna dae onything, ma man, excep' hope for the best."

* * * * *

At dead of night—

"Lizzie!"

Silence.

"Lizzie!"

"Eh?—what is't, John?"

"I was thinkin', wife; I was thinkin' it's no sae bad since her name's Maggie. Ye see, if it had been Henrietta, or Dorothea, or——"

"Mercy! Are ye talkin' in yer sleep?"

"I was gaun for to say that a Henrietta an' so forth wud be easier traced nor a Maggie, Maggies bein' as common as walks at Dunoon, whereas——"

"D'ye imagine Christina—oh, dinna be silly, man!"

"But, Maggie—I mean Lizzie——"

"Oh, for ony favour gang to sleep an' rest yer brains."

* * * * *

When Macgreegor, alone save for the slumbering Jimsie, had opened the parcel he muttered savagely: "Oh, dash it! I wish she had kep' her rotten socks to hersel'!"—and stuffed the gift behind the chest of drawers. The message he tore into a hundred fragments. Then he went to bed and slept better, perhaps, than he deserved. He expected there would be a letter in the morning, for Christina had left no message with his mother.

But there was no letter, so, after breakfast, he made a trip to the camp on the chance, and in the hope, that one might be lying there. Another blow! Managing to dodge Willie, he hurried home to meet the second morning delivery. Nothing again! . . . His mother's anxious questions as to his health irritated him, and he so far lost his temper as to ask his sister why she was wear-

ing a face like a fiddle. Poor Jeannie! For half the night she had been weeping for her hero and wishing the most awful things for the unknown Maggie.

"Ye'll be back for yer dinner, laddie?" his mother called after him as he left the house.

"I dinna ken," he replied over his shoulder.

Mrs. Robinson felt that her worst forebodings were about to be realized.

"Never again!" she muttered in the presence of her daughter, who was helping her with the housework.

"What, mither?"

"Never again will I open a paircel that's no addressed to me."

"But it—it might ha'e been a—a fish," said Jeannie, who would have sought to comfort the most sinful penitent in the world. "Some girls," she went on, "dinna mean onything special by 'fondest love.' They dinna mean onything mair nor 'kind regairds.' "

Mrs. Robinson sighed. "I wud gi'e something if it had been a fish wi' kind regairds. I wonder what he did wi' the socks."

"I got them at the back o' the chest o' drawers. Weel, mither, that proves he doesna care for her."

"That's no the p'int, dearie." Mrs. Robinson paused in her work. "I'm beginnin' to think I should ha'e tell't him aboot the paircel bein' open when Christina was here. It's maybe no fair to let him gang to her——"

"I'll run efter him," said Jeannie promptly. "I'll maybe catch him afore he gets to Miss Tod's shop."

"Run, Jeannie; run as quick's ye can!"

So Jeannie threw off her apron, tidied her hair with a couple of touches, and flew as though a life depended on her speed.

And, panting, she came in sight of Miss Tod's shop just in time—just in time to see the beloved kilted figure disappear into the doorway.

XIX

A SERIOUS REVERSE

THE fact that Christina had not written was a paralyzing blow to Macgreegor's self-confidence and left him altogether uncertain of his ground. For the time being his sense of guilt as well as that of injury was almost swamped by the awful dread that she had simply grown tired of him. He entered the shop with foreboding—and received another blow.

A smartly dressed young man was lounging at the counter, apparently basking in Christina's smiles. As a matter of fact, the young man was merely choosing a note-book, and until the moment of Macgreegor's entrance had been treated with the slightly haughty politeness which Christina made a point of administering to males under fifty. But with amazing

abruptness she became so charming that the young man, a sensitive, susceptible creature, decided that an ordinary penny note-book would not do.

"Well," said Christina sweetly, "here are some at twopence, threepence and sixpence. The sixpenny ones are extremely reliable."

After some desultory conversation in low tones, during which Macgreegor writhed with frequently averted gaze, the young man chose a sixpenny one and put down a florin, regretfully remarking that he had to catch a confounded train.

With a delicious smile Christina handed him his change, and with a graceful salute he fled without counting it. Immediately the door had closed Christina realized that she had given him one and ninepence. A small matter at such a time, yet it may have been the last straw. She had no word for Macgreegor as he came to the counter, his uncertainty increased by that delicious smile given to another.

"Weel, ye've got back," was all he could utter, and her attitude stopped him in the first movement of offering his hand.

"Yesterday afternoon," she returned coldly.

"Ay, I ken. I wish ye had sent me word," he managed to say after a slight pause.

"It did not seem necessary. I suppose your mother told you."

"I heard it first frae Aunt Purdie. I missed ye by less nor an 'oor. It was gey hard lines."

Christina stared.

"I got leave yesterday mornin' an' catched the first train to Aberdeen——"

"Oh! . . . What on earth took you to Aberdeen?"

"Christina," he exclaimed, "dinna speak like that! I gaed to Aberdeen because I couldna thole it ony mair."

"Thole what?"

"Oh, ye ken! . . . Maybe I had nae business to be vexed at ye for gaun wi'

Aunt Purdie, but oh, Christina dear, I wisht ye hadna gaed."

He dropped his gaze and continued: "I'm tellin' ye I gaed to Aberdeen because something seemed to ha'e come betwixt us, because I——" He stuck. Confession in the face of stern virtue is not so easy after all.

"Pity you had the long journey," she said airily, "but you ought to have stopped for a day or two when you were there. Aberdeen is a delightful city." She turned and surveyed the shelves above her.

His look then would have melted the heart of any girl, except this one who loved him.

"Christina," he said piteously, "it wasna a' ma fault."

Leisurely she faced him.

"May I ask what you are referring to?"

"Ye never said ye was sorry to leave me; yer letters wasna like ye, an' I didna ken what to think. An' then the cocoa-

nut fairly put the lid on. I tell ye, a chap has to dae *something* when a girl treats him like that."

"Has he?"

He winced. "But I forgive ye——"

"Thanks!"

"—because I'm gaun to tell ye a' aboot it, Christina, an ask ye kindly to forgive *me*. Ay, I'm gaun to tell ye everything —everything! But I canna think," he blundered on, "I'm sayin', I canna think hoo I happened to get yer monkey up to begin wi'——"

"Excuse me!" she cried, indignant. "My monkey up, indeed!"

"Weel, maybe it wasna exac'ly yer monkey up; but I want to ken what way ye didna write a nicer letter afore ye gaed awa'. Nae doobt ye was in a hurry, but it jist seemed as if ye didna care a button for me. Maybe ma letter to you wasna the thing, either, but I was that hurt when I wrote it, an' ye might ha'e understood hoo I was feelin'. Christina, tell what was

wrang that ye gaed awa' like yon. Was ye—was ye fed up wi' me?"

Christina took up a pencil and began to spoil it with a patent sharpener. "Really, it is not worth while discussing," she said.

"What? No worth while? Oh, hoo can ye say a thing like that! . . . But maybe I best tell ye ma ain story first."

"Many thanks. But I'm afraid I'm not deeply interested in any story of yours." She was almost sorry the next moment. It was just as if she had struck him.

Presently he recovered a little. "Christina," he said quietly, "that's no true."

"Hoo daur ye!" she cried, forgetting her 'fine English' as well as her haughty pose.

"If it was true, it wud mean that ye've been judgin' me unfair, kennin' it was unfair, an' I'll never believe ye wud dae that. . . . So, Christina dear, listen to me an' gi'e me a chance."

"Oh, what's the use," she sighed with

sudden weariness, "what's the use o' pretendin', Macgreegor?"

"Wha's pretendin'?"

"You! What's the use o' pretendin' ye're hurt? Fine ye ken I'm no the—the only girl in the world."

"The's no anither like ye!"

"Weel," she said drily, "that means variety, does it no?" She drew a long breath and moved back from the counter. "I want to be as fair as I can, so perhaps I'd best ask ye a straight question."

"Ask it!" he said eagerly.

"Wha's Maggie?"

He was taken aback, but less so than she had expected, and possibly that increased her bitterness.

"She's a girl," he began.

"I could ha'e guessed that much. What sort o' girl?" she demanded, and wished she had held her tongue.

"She—she's kin' o' fat——"

"Fat!" Christina uttered the word with as much disgust as she would have evinced

had she been handed a pound of streaky bacon without the paper. "How delightful! Anything else in the way of charms?"

"Christina, gi'e me a chance, an' I'll tell ye a' aboot it."

"Not another word! How long have you enjoyed the young lady's acquaintance?"

"Only a couple o' evenin's, but——"

"Case of love at first sight, I suppose!"

He flared up. "If ye hadna left me I wud never ha'e met her. If ye had wrote me a dacent letter——"

"Whisht, man!" she said in momentary pity. "Ye're talkin' like a wean."

"I canna help it. I'm that fond o' ye. An' it's no as if I had done a black crime. It was a pure accident——"

"Jist like a penny novel," she interrupted, merciless again. "Weel, I'm sure ye're welcome to ha'e as mony girls as ye like—only, ye'll ha'e to leave me oot. That's a'!" She took out her purse and

from it something small which, stepping forward, she laid on the counter near him. Her engagement ring!

After a moment of strained silence—"Christina!" he gasped; "Christina! ye canna mean it serious!"

"Good-bye," she said stiffly, stepping back.

"But—but ye ha'ena heard ma story. It's no fair——"

"Oh," she cried harshly, "dinna keep on at that tune!"

All at once he drew himself up. "Noo I see what ye mean," he said in an almost even voice. "Ye had made up yer mind to be quit o' me. Still, it wud ha'e been honester to say ye was fed up to ma face. Weel, I'm no blamin' ye, an' I canna force ye to listen to ma story, no that it wud be worth ma while noo to shame masel' wi' the tellin'. I'll no even ask ye hoo ye cam' to hear aboot Maggie. Maggie's jist an or'nar' girl, an' I'm jist an or'nar' chap that done a stupid thing because he

couldna think what else to dae. Weel, ye'll sune forget me, an' maybe I'll sune forget you—wi' the help o' a bullet——"

"Oh, dinna!" she whispered.

"An' as for this"—he picked up the ring and let it drop on the floor—"to blazes wi' sich nonsense!"—and ground it under his heel. "So long!" he said, and went out quickly.

XX

THE REAL THING AT LAST

FOR an appreciable number of seconds after the door had closed Christina continued to gaze in its direction, her head well up, her face stern and rather pale. Then, quite suddenly, her bosom gave a quick heave, her lips parted, trembling, her eyes blinked, her whole attitude became lax. But she was not going to cry; certainly not! She was far too angry for tears; angry with herself no less than Macgreegor. He had actually departed without being dismissed; worse still, he had had the last word! An observer—the thought struck her—would have assumed that she, weak wretch, had humbly allowed him to go and leave her in the wrong! Her maiden pride had somehow failed her, for she ought to have sent

him forth crushed. And yet, surely, she had hurt, punished, humiliated him. Oh, no doubt of that! And for a moment her illogical heart wavered. She drew out her hanky, muttering "how I hate him!"—and blew her pretty nose. Then she clenched her hands and set her teeth. Then she went lax again. Then—oh, dear! he had even insulted her by leaving her to pick up the cast-off ring!—for, of course, she could not leave it there for Miss Tod or a customer to see.

Haughtily she moved round the counter and with scornful finger-tips took up the tiny wreckage of a great hope. The gold was twisted and bruised, the little pearls were loose in their places. All at once she felt a horrid pain in her throat. . . .

Miss Tod appeared, fresh from the joys of strong tea.

"Oh, lassie, ha'e ye hurted yersel'?"

Christina choked, recovered herself and cried: "I've sold a blighter a sixpenny note-book for threepence, an' I'll never get

over it as long as I live. B—but I hope that'll no be long!"

Just then Heaven sent a customer.

* * * * *

And perhaps Heaven sent the telegram that Macgreegor found on his return home, rather late in the afternoon. The war has changed many things and people, but mothers most of all. Mrs. Robinson made no mention of the "extra special" dinner prepared so vainly in her son's honour. "Yer faythe missed ye," was her only reference to his absence from the meal.

The telegram was an order to return to duty. The mother and sister saw his eyes change, his shoulders stiffen.

"Maybe something's gaun to happen at last," he said; and almost in the same breath, though in a different voice—"Christina's finished wi' me. It was ma ain fault. Ye needna speak aboot it. I—I'm no heedin'—greatly." He cleared his throat. "I'll awa' up to the works an' say

guid-bye to father. Jimsie can come, if he likes. Ye needna tell him the noo—what I tell't ye."

Jimsie, summoned from play, was proud to go with his big brother. He was ill next day owing to a surfeit of good things consumed at high pressure, but not too ill to discuss what he would purchase with the half-crown that seemed to have stuck to his hot little paw.

Back from the works, Macgreegor found tea awaiting him. His mother and sister were not a little relieved by his cheerfulness, though they were to doubt its sincerity later. But the boy had never made a greater effort for the sake of those who loved him than in that little piece of dissembling.

The parting was brief. An embrace, a kiss, a word or two that meant little yet all—and he was out of the home.

His laugh, slightly subdued, came up the well of the staircase—"Maybe it's anither false alarm!"

They looked over the rail, mute but trying to smile, and saw the last of him—a hurrying sturdy, boyish figure, kilt swinging and hand aloft in final farewell.

His route took him through the street of Miss Tod's shop. It was characteristic of Macgreegor that he did not choose another and less direct course. He neither hesitated nor looked aside as he marched past the shop. The sense of injustice still upheld him. "She never gi'ed me a chance!" . . . And so back to Duty.

* * * * *

Not more than five minutes later Private William Thomson came along in hot haste and banged into the shop.

"Macgreegor no here?" he demanded, and looked astounded.

"No," answered Christina, without laying down the book she had been trying to read.

"Jist left ye?"

"No."

"When did ye see him?"

"This morning."

"Gor! I could ha'e bet onything I wud ha'e catched him here. He had jist left the hoose when I——"

"Why are you so excited?" she coldly inquired.

"Me? I'm no excited. Jist been canoodlin' wi' ma aunt. She sprung five bob! Come oot an' I'll stan' ye a slider."

"I regret I cannot accept your kind invitation."

"Haw, haw! It's you for the language! But I say!" He leaned over the counter. "What way are ye no greetin'?"

She flushed hotly, wondering how much he knew or guessed, but replied coolly enough: "I have nothing to weep aboot. Have you?"

"Plenty, by Jings! I expected to see yer eyes an' nose rid, onyway, Christina."

"Indeed! Is that how it affects you?"

He looked hard at her. "My! ye're a game yin!" he said admiringly. "Weel, I maun slope," he went on, with a sigh

that sounded absurd, coming from him. "I suppose ye've nae message for Macgreegor—something ye forgot to say at the last meenute? Eh?"

Christina was at a loss. Apparently he knew nothing, yet his manner was odd.

"No message, thank you," said she slowly.

"Then I'll bid ye guid-bye—an' I could bet ye a bob ye'll never see me again. So I'll tell ye something." His words came with a rush. "Ye're aboot the nicest girl I ever kent, Christina. Macgreegor's a luckier blighter nor he deserves. But I'll look efter him for ye in Flanders. Trust me for that. Noo that we're really boun' for the Front, in a day or so, things is different—at least I'm feelin' different. Dinna laugh! I—I dinna want to ha'e ony enemies but the Germans. I've jist been an' kissed ma aunt! An' noo"—he caught her hand, pulled her to him—"I'm gaun to kiss *you!* There!" He turned and bolted.

Christina's hand went to her cheek, and fell back to her side. Her colour ebbed as swiftly as it had flowed. She began to shake. "Bound for the Front, in a day or so." . . .

Later she went to the sitting-room where her employer was once more absorbing comfort from a cup. "Miss Tod," she said quietly, "I want to gang hame."

In the evening she posted a small package with this note enclosed—

"I am sending the ring Mrs. McOstrich said I was to give you when the time came for you to go. I hope it will bring you good luck. God bless you.

"CHRISTINA."

She lay awake most of the night, wondering if she might not have written more, wondering what answer he would send, wondering—wondering. . . .

And as she fell asleep in the grey of morning, hours before the package would

be delivered at the camp, a long train, at an outlying station, started on its way south, and six hundred eager lads shouted in the face of all things.

"We're awa' this time," yelled Willie in his friend's ear.

And Macgreegor laughed wildly and wrung his friend's hand.

XXI

"HULLO, GLESCA HIELANDERS!"

LIKE a trodden, forgotten thing Private Macgreegor Robinson lay on the Flanders mud, under the murk and rain. A very long time it seemed since that short, grim struggle amid the blackness and intermittent brightness. The night was still rent with noise and light, but the storm of battle had passed from the place where he had fallen. He could not tell whether his fellows had taken the enemy's trench or retired to their own. He had the vaguest ideas as to where he was. But he knew that there was pain in his left shoulder and right foot, that he was athirst, also that he had killed a man—a big stout man, old enough to have been his father. He

tried not to think of the last, though he did not regret it: it had been a splendid moment.

He was not the only soldier lying there in the mud, but the others, friend or foe, were quite still. The sight of them in the flashes distressed him, yet always his gaze drifted back to them. His mind was a medley of thoughts, from the ugliest to the loveliest. At last, for he was greatly exhausted, his head drooped to his uninjured arm, his eyes closed. For a while he dozed. Then something disturbed him, and he raised himself and peered. In the flicker of a distant flare he saw a shape approaching him, crawling on hands and knees, very slowly, pausing for an instant at each still figure. It made Macgreegor think of a big dog searching for its master —only it wore a helmet. Macgreegor setting his teeth, drew his rifle between his knees and unfixed the bayonet. . . .

"Hist! Is that you, Macgreegor?"

"Wullie!"

"Whisht, ye——!"

"Oh, Wullie"—in a whisper—"I'm gled to see ye!"

"I believe ye!" gasped Willie, and flattened out at his friend's side, breathing heavily. At the end of a minute or so—"Ha'e ye got it bad, Macgreegor?" he inquired.

"So, so. Arm an' leg. I'm feelin' rotten, but I'm no finished yet. Ha'e ye ony water? Ma bottle's shot through."

"Here ye are. . . . Feelin' seeck-like?"

"I'm seeck at gettin' knocked oot at the vera start."

"Never heed. Did ye kill yer man?"

"Ay."

"Same here. . . . In the back. . . . Ma Goad!"

"Ha'e we ta'en their trench?"

"Ay; but no enough o' us to haud it. We're back in the auld place. Better luck next time. No safe to strike a match here; could dae fine wi' a fag."

There was a silence between them, broken at last by Macgreegor.

"Hoo did ye find me, Wullie? What way are ye no back in the trench?"

"Wasna gaun back wi'oot ye—I seen ye drap—even if ye had been a corp. . . . Been snokin' aroun' seekin' ye for Guid kens hoo long. I'm fair stickin' wi' mud."

". . . . I'm obleeged to ye, Wullie, but ye shouldna ha'e done it. Whereaboots are we?"

"I wisht I was sure. Lost ma bearin's. I doobt we're nearer the Germans nor oor ain lot. That's the reason I'm weerin' this dish-cover. But it's your turn to weer it. Ye've been wounded a'ready."

"Na, na, Wullie!"

"Dae what I tell ye, ye——!" Willie made the exchange of headgear. . . . "I say, Macgreegor!"

"What?"

"This is Flanders. Ye mind oor bet? Weel, we're quits noo. I'm no owin' ye onything—eh?"

Macgreegor grinned in spite of everything. "Ay, we're quits noo, Wullie, sure enough."

"If ever we get oot o' this, will ye len' us dew francs?"

" 'Deed, ay. . . . Wullie, ye're riskin' yer life for me."

"Awa' an' chase yersel'! I wonder what that girl o' yours is thinkin' aboot the noo—if she's no sleepin'."

There was a pause till Macgreegor said awkwardly: "Christina's finished wi' me."

"Eh?"

"I couldna tell ye afore; but she had got wind o' Maggie."

"Maggie! Oh,——! But no frae me, Macgreegor, no frae me! Ye believe that?"

"Oh, ay."

Willie let off sundry curses. "But I suppose I'm to blame," he said bitterly.

"Naebody to blame but masel'."

"But did ye no explain to Christina?

'A' ye did was to canoodle wi' the wrang girl, pro tem.—a thing that happens daily. I couldna fancy a girl that naebody had ever wanted to cuddle; an' if I was a girl I couldna fancy a chap that——"

"Nae use talkin' aboot it, Wullie," Macgreegor said sadly, wearily.

"Aw, but her an' you'll mak' it up afore ye're done. If ye dinna, I'll want to kill masel' an' Maggie forbye. A' the same, I wisht fat Maggie was here the noo. I could dae fine wi' a bit squeeze."

"My! ye're a fair treat!" said Macgreegor, chuckling in his misery.

"'*Sh!* Keep still! Something comin'!"

The distant gun-fire had diminished. There were appreciable silences between the blasts. But during a flash Macgreegor detected a helmeted crawling shape. Willie's hand stole out and grasped the bayonet.

"Number twa!" he muttered, with a stealthy movement. "I maun get him!"

But Macgreegor's ears caught a faint

sound that caused him to grip the other's wrist. "Wait," he whispered.

The helmeted shape came on, looking neither to right nor left, and as it came it sobbed. And it passed within a few yards of them, and into the deeper gloom, sobbing, sobbing.

"Oh, Goad!" sighed Willie, shuddering. "Put yer arm roun' me, Mac. I'm feart."

Five minutes later he affected to jeer at himself. "Weel, I'm rested noo," he continued, "an' it's time we was gettin' a move on. Mornin's comin', an if we're spotted here, we're done for. Can ye creep?"

Macgreegor tried and let out a little yelp.

"Na, ye canna. Ye'll jist ha'e to get on ma back."

"Wullie, gang yersel'——"

"Obey yer corporal!"

"Ye're no a corp——"

"If they dinna mak' me a corporal for

this, I'll quit the service! Onyway, I'm no gaun wi'oot ye. Same time, I canna guarantee no to tak' ye to the German lines. But we maun risk that. Ye'll ha'e to leave yer rifle, but keep on the dish-cover till I gi'e ye the word. . . . Noo then! Nae hurry. I'll ha'e to creep the first part o' the journey. Are ye ready? Weel, here's luck to the twa o' us!"

There is no authentic description of that horrible journey save Willie's, which is unprintable.

It was performed literally by inches. More than once Willie collapsed, groaning under his burden. Macgreegor, racked as he was, shed tears for his friend's sake. Time had no significance except as a measure of suspense and torture. But Willie held on, directed by some instinct, it seemed, over that awful shell-fragment-studded mire, round the verges of shell-formed craters, past dead and wounded waiting for succour—on, on, till the very guns seemed to have grown weary, and the

rain ceased, and the air grew chillier as with dread of what the dawn should disclose, and the blackness was diluted to grey.

"Drap the —— dish-cover," croaked Willie, and halted for a minute's rest.

Then on again. But at long last Willie muttered: "I think it's oor trench. If I'm wrang, fareweel to Argyle Street! I'll ha'e to risk gi'ein' them a hail in case some silly blighter lets fly in this rotten licht. Slip doon, Mac—nae hurry—nae use hurtin' yersel' for naething. I'll maybe ha'e to hurt ye in a meenute. . . . Noo for it!" He lifted up his voice. "Hullo, Glesca Hielanders!"

It seemed an age until—

"Right oh!" came a cheerful response.

"Hurray!" yelled Willie, and rose stiffly to his feet.

Then with a final effort, he gave Macgreegor the "fireman's lift," and staggered and stumbled, amid shots from the other side, into safety.

XXII

NO HERO YET HAPPY

CHRISTINA was arranging the counter for the day's business when the postman brought her a letter in a green envelope with the imprint "On Active Service." Her heart leapt only to falter as her eyes took in the unfamiliar writing. Then under the "Certificate" on the left-hand side she perceived the signature—"W. Thomson." Something dreadful must have happened! she sat down and gazed at the envelope, fingering it stupidly. At last she pulled herself together and opened it. The letter was dirty, ill-written, badly spelt; but so are many of the finest-spirited letters of these days.

"If you are wanting a perfeck man, bye yourself a statute from the muesum.

Then you can treat him cold and he will not nottice other girls when you leav him for to enjoy yourself. Mac was not for haveing anny when he first seen Maggie, but he was vext at you, and I eggged him on with telling him he was feared, and he took her in a cab becaus it was poring, and maybe he gave her a bit sqeese. I do not no for certin, but it is more like she began it, for Maggie woud rather take a cuddel nor a good dinner anny day. Likewize there is times when a chap must sqeese something. It is no use for a girl to expeck her intended to keep looking at her when she is not there, unless she makes it worth his while with nice letters and so fourth. He gets soon fed up on cold nothings. Mac does not care a roten aple for Maggie, but you left him nothing better, and she is a nice girl and soft with a man, so God forgive you as I will not till I hear you are reddy to kiss him again. Mac is wounded in 2 places, but not mortle. He got wounded saveing my life. I

am not wounded yet. He garded my back, which saved me. Probly you will see him soon, so prepare to behave yourself. Remmember you alowed me to kiss you? ? ? Hopping you will take this good advice more kindly nor usual.

Yours resp.
W. THOMSON.
Lce. Corp. 9th H.L.I.

P.S.—If you was less proud and more cuddelsom, you woud not loss much fun in this world.—W. T., Lce. Corp. 9th H.L.I.

* * * * *

Macgreegor was in a small hospital not far from London. While not to be described as serious, his wounds were likely to keep him out of action for several months to come. He was comfortable, and the people were very kind. Their English speech puzzled him almost as much as his Scotch amused them.

More tired than pained, he lay idly

watching the play of light on his old-fashioned ring, the gift of Mrs. McOstrich. It had reached him just before he was borne from France, too late, he thought, to bring him luck. But the only luck he wanted now was Christina. He had her brief note by heart. There was kindness but no comfort in the words; forgiveness, maybe, but no promise of reconciliation. Truly he had made a horrid mess of it; nevertheless he rebelled against taking all the blame. Christina could not have cared much when she would listen to no explanations. . . . Now he had a great longing for the touch of his mother and the smile of his father, the soft speech of Jeannie and the eager pipings of wee Jimsie. Also, he wondered, with a sort of ache, how Willie was faring.

A nurse appeared, sorted his pillow, chatted for a moment, then went and drew down the blinds against the afternoon sun. And presently Macgreegor dropped into a doze

He awoke to what seemed a dream. Of all people, Aunt Purdie was seated at his bedside.

In a hesitating way, quite unlike her, she put out her hand, laid it on his and patted gently.

"What's up?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"How do you do, Macgreegor?" she said formally yet timidly.

"Fine, thenk ye," he answered from sheer force of habit. Then— "Ye've come a lang road to see me," he said, gratitude asserting itself.

"It *is* a conseederable distance," she returned, with some recovery of her old manner. "Your uncle said I must go the moment he heard where you were, and I quite homologated him. We was all copiously relieved to hear of the non-seriosity of your wounds. I have letters for you from your parents and sister, forbye your brother James. Your mother was anxious to come, too, but decided to wait for my

report, your condeetion not being grave. All well at home and proud of you, but I was en rout before I heard the most gratifying news." She cleared her throat with an important cough, and Macgreegor hoped none of the other chaps in the ward were listening. "I am exceedingly proud of you, Macgreegor!"

"Me? What for?"

"Ah, do not distimulate, my boy; do not be too modest. You have saved a comrade's life! It was magneeficent!"

"Eh?"

"Oh, I know all aboot it—how you protected your friend William with your wounded body——"

Macgreegor's hand went to his head. "I suppose I'm sober," he muttered. "Wha was stuffin' ye wi' a' this, Aunt Purdie?"

Aunt Purdie's manner was almost sprightly as she whispered—

"Your betrothed!"

"Ma what?"

"Christina, her own self, told me. So there you are, young man!"

Macgreegor's head wagged feebly on the pillow. "There's a bonny mix-up somewhere," he said; "it was Wullie saved ma life." Then, with an effort—"When did ye see her?"

"Now understand, Macgreegor, there must be no excitement. You must keep calm. I am doing my best to break it gently. H'm! h'm! As a matter of fac', I seen—saw—your fiancy about ten minutes ago. She is without!"

"Wi'oot what?"

"She is in an adjacent apartment."

"Here?"

"I am going to despatch her to you now," said Aunt Purdie, enjoying herself thoroughly. "But mind!—no deleterious excitement!" She rose with a look on her gaunt face which he had never seen before.

"Aunt Purdie," he whispered, "did she *want* to come?"

"My dear nephew, without exaggeration I may say that she fairly jamp—jumped— at my invitation! Well, I'll see you subsequently."

"God bless ye," he murmured, and closed his eyes till he felt she had gone from the ward.

He knew when Christina came in, but did not look directly at her till she was beside him. By that time she had controlled the quiver at her mouth. And when he looked he realized that he had no defence whatsoever in the Maggie affair. Nothing was left him but love and regret.

She touched his hand and seated herself. "I couldna help comin'," she said, smiling. "Are ye feelin' better?"

"Oh, ay. But I maun tell ye the truth."

"No a word, Mac, noo or ever. I'll no listen."

"But it's a' nonsense aboot me savin' a comrade. Wullie Thomson saved me. I canna think hoo ye heard sic a story, but it's got to be stopped. An' though I'm

terrible gled to see yer face again, I'm vexed ye cam' a' that lang road thinkin' I was a hero. Still, there's a chap in the next bed that's gaun to get a medal for——"

"We'll talk aboot it later," she interrupted gently. "But I'll jist tell ye that a' I took the journey for was to see a lad that was wounded. An' I think"—a faint laugh—"I've got a wound o' ma ain."

He sighed, his eyes on his ring. "Ye had aye a kind heart, Christina. I'm obleeged to ye for comin' . . . I wud like to tell ye something—no as an excuse, for it wud be nae excuse, but jist to get quit o' the thing—aboot the time when ye was in Aberdeen——"

"Oh, never!"

"Jist that. Weel, I'll no bother ye," he said, with hopeless resignation. Next moment he was ashamed of himself. He must change the subject. He actually smiled. "Hoo did ye leave Miss Tod? Still drinkin'?"

Christina may not have heard him. She was surveying the ward. Macgreegor's only near neighbour was apparently sound asleep, and the only patient sitting up was intent on a game of draughts with a nurse. But had all been awake and watching, she would still have found a way.

She passed her handkerchief lightly across her eyes and put it in her sleeve. Then with the least possible movement she knelt down by the bedside.

"Christina!" he exclaimed under his breath, for her face was near to his.

Her fingers went to the neck of her white blouse and drew out a narrow black ribbon. From it hung, shining, the tiny wreckage of her engagement ring.

"Mac, dear," she whispered, "can—can we no ha'e it mended?"

Printed in the United States of America.

11 1930